Life-Stories of Famous Men

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

J. M. ROBERTSON

CAL STATE HAYWARD LIBRARY

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW

Failure to return books on the date due will
result in assessment of overdue fees.

CT 788 B7 R6
3 0050 00032 1447

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE
AT HAYWARD
LIBRARY

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

ISSUED FOR THE
RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION,
LIMITED

AGED 48

Frontispiece

LIFE-STORIES OF FAMOUS MEN

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

BY

J. M. ROBERTSON

LONDON:
WATTS & CO.,
17 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4.
1920

CT
788
37
R6

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE
AT HAYWARD
LIBRARY

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFATORY NOTE	vi
I. JUVENILE PREPARATION	1
II. SOLDIER AND CIVILIAN	13
III. ANTI-RELIGION	24
IV. POLITICS	35
V. ADVENTURES AND CONFLICTS	48
VI. NEO-MALTHUSIANISM	57
VII. PARLIAMENTARY STRUGGLE	66
VIII. CLOSING YEARS	100
IX. INFLUENCE AND PERSONALITY	113

ILLUSTRATIONS

AGED 48	*Frontispiece*
PRIVATE, 7TH DRAGOON GUARDS—AGED 20	*Facing p.* 16
AT THE BAR OF THE HOUSE	,, 70
AGED 57	,, 112

PREFATORY NOTE

AN authoritative life of Charles Bradlaugh, by his daughter, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, was published in 1895, the present writer adding chapters on Bradlaugh's political and religious opinions, and a record of his Parliamentary Struggle. To that biography the reader is referred for fuller details and references where the present short sketch is of necessity lacking.

As Bradlaugh's life was one of battle, it has been necessary, even in a short account, to indicate the missiles which were employed against him. Hence a special atmosphere of controversy. But that belongs to the whole story, and to have tried to escape it would have been to falsify history.

J. M. R.

I

JUVENILE PREPARATION

EVEN the complacent generation which has so confidently indicted the Victorian age for all manner of shortcomings, ethical and æsthetical, is not wont to claim that its own public men, commonly so called, excel their predecessors in moral stature. A certain massiveness and an enduring energy mark out whole rows of "platform men" between 1837 and the century's end. Committed by their circumstances to a grim succession of struggles, they were formidable fighters, defiant, unyielding, yet in the main without rancour, as is demanded by the best ideals of their race. Certainly not to them can we plausibly apply Mill's description of his age as lacking in conviction. As little did they incur the other reproach, also cited by Mill with approval as widely deserved, of indulging in "the deep slumber of a decided opinion." For their opinions they battled with all the tenacity that their countrymen ever exhibited in physical war. And of all the long line none was more largely compact of courage and force, and none more defiant of common prejudice, than the "notorious" heretic, Charles Bradlaugh.

Born on September 26, 1833, in the same year with Gordon, he had his upbringing in the early years of reformed franchise, under the shade of the Corn Laws, in a London in which only one bridge, the oldest, was free of toll. Slavery was abolished in the British Empire in the year of his birth; but between low wages, unem-

ployment, and dear bread the life conditions of masses of the British people, especially the peasantry, were chronically worse than they had been a hundred years before. The boy's lot was not of the worst, but it was not an easy one. Charles Bradlaugh, senior, born in London of a stock long settled in Suffolk,[1] was confidential clerk to a firm of lawyers at two pounds a week, upon which he had to bring up a family of five children, of whom Charles junior was the eldest. To send the boy to school from his seventh to his twelfth year was thus a creditable effort on the father's part in the circumstances. The little house in which he was born, in Bacchus Walk, Hoxton, has latterly been swept away to make room for a State school: in those days, and for a generation after, there were none such save the poor "national" schools of that age. At twelve Charles junior became errand-boy in the office in Cloak Lane in which his father was clerk. Primary schooling determines whether a man is or is not to be illiterate; after that his culture depends more or less on his bent and build; and the boy Bradlaugh contrived in two years of errand-running to lay or trace the foundations of the legal knowledge which was to make him in his maturity, by professional admission, "the greatest lay lawyer in England." Also he began reading omnivorously at the second-hand bookstalls, having no access to anything in the shape of a public library, but saving all the coppers he could from omnibus fares and tolls to buy books of his own. To run round by London Bridge when he might have walked or ridden over another was his mode of thrift. As a child, stirred by the talk around him, he had solemnly invested one halfpenny in the purchase of

[1] The name, which in this form is very rare, appears to be an early variant of "Bradley."

a copy of *The People's Charter*, but was not thereby diverted much from the proper pursuits of his age. About the same time, instructed by some elder, he read in his father's copy of Cobbett's *Political Gridiron*. But while he was in all ways predestined to politics, his master faculties determined for him a conjoint activity which was to make his life a warfare on earth.

At the age of fourteen, too poor to buy the book, he had copied out for himself parts of Emerson's lecture on *Self-Reliance*. Doubtless they included the sentence: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." His did, till his dying day; and he was soon to begin to live up to the great monition. His father, in those days, never went to church, but had no anti-religious views, and duly sent his children to Sunday school, already the well-established provision for relieving English parents of their religious responsibilities and securing domestic quiet during some part of the day of rest. The boy Charles was a diligent and promising pupil, and at the age of fifteen had been promoted to the status of Sunday school teacher, in accordance with the inexpensive educational principle introduced by Joseph Lancaster in 1798, whereby pupils became teaching monitors as soon as they knew their rudiments.

The presiding clergyman, Mr. Packer, of St. Peter's, Hackney Road, directed him, as one of his best pupils, to prepare himself for confirmation by the Bishop; and it was on this prompting that the boy set about his first critical study of the Gospels and the Thirty-nine Articles. With his little schooling, he was notably precocious. At fourteen he had passed from the status of errand-boy to that of wharf clerk and cashier to a firm of coal merchants at a salary of eleven shillings a week; and already his brain was active. He had had no critical guidance, heterodox or other, but with his keen natural

eye for evidence he found certain contradictions, and he respectfully wrote to ask his pastor for light. The latter, being of the "stand no nonsense" school, promptly wrote to the boy's father to inform him that his son showed atheistical leanings, and at the same time suspended the youth for three months from his teaching functions. The sequel is memorable. Driven from Sunday school and branded as atheistical, the boy, aged about fifteen, shrank from church, and very naturally betook himself on that now leisured day to the neighbouring Bonner's Fields, where there already went on at that period many of those open-air discourses and discussions on politics and religion which to this day constitute a feature of the Sunday life of the London parks. So far from being an atheist, he was still warmly devoted to the religion in which he had for years been trained, and, born debater as he was, stood up in its defence against some of the shrewd polemists of the fields. With one of them, James Savage, a cool and sarcastic reasoner of considerable culture, he debated on the inspiration of the Bible; and the freethinker, wiser in his generation than Packer, courteously confuted his juvenile antagonist to the point of convincing him that the dogma in question was not rationally tenable.

Even then the boy did not turn atheist, but took the normal step into deism, which had been the creed of ninety English freethinkers in every hundred for a century past. But the zealous Packer contrived that he should not halt. Having reached the deistic stage, the youngster, still amicably anxious for discussion with his pastor, submitted to his attention a copy of the *Diegesis* of the Rev. Robert Taylor, a freakish work of which the discursive and wholly undigested learning was beyond the power of either the boy or his pastor to estimate; and the latter, after his manner, took fresh repressive

measures. Already he had induced the alarmed parents to confront their boy with appropriate scriptural texts hung on the household walls. The fact that Charles had become an ardent teetotaller confirmed the pastor in his conviction that the heretic was going to the devil. Once, finding the lad's name on a poster-board at the door of a freethinkers' meeting-place announcing some discussion, he induced the much-perturbed father to remove it under cover of darkness—a proceeding which had swiftly to be reversed. Now he persuaded the father to notify the boy's employers that he would withdraw his pecuniary security if within three days the lad did not alter his opinions; and Packer for his own part conveyed to the offender the ultimatum that he must at once recant or lose his situation. In later life Bradlaugh took the charitable view that the threat had been intended to terrify him, not to expel him from his home; but the self-respecting boy, determined not to live in idleness on his father, on the third day packed up his little belongings, parted from his devoted sister Elizabeth with tears and kisses and a keepsake which she treasured till her death, and left his father's house.

The father, a reticent man of conformist character, made no attempt to call him back; the mother, a disciplinarian person, was equally static. He lived close at hand for some time, making, to their knowledge, a very poor living; and, doubtless feeling that they had hatched a strange portent, under the clergyman's advice they let him go his own way. How he derived from them his manly and genial nature is one of the mysteries of heredity; but one can trace in them at least something of his pertinacity. Never in after life did he say an undutiful word of either of them, his recollections mainly taking the form of an affectionate memory of the many times when his father and he, getting up at three

in the morning, walked three miles to fish in the river Lea before they went to their office-work together.

In effect expelled from home by the strategy of Parson Packer, the boy, getting temporary hospitality from an old Chartist nearly as poor as himself, set to work to make a living as a middleman in the coal business, getting orders, with payment in advance, and drawing the trade commission. The juvenile enterprise might have grown in such hands to a sufficiency; but the "religious difficulty" again supervened. His best customer was the wife of a baker, who treated him kindly; but one day, "from information received," she launched the thunderbolt: "Charles, I hear you are an infidel!" and the most diplomatic efforts failed to turn the conversation to the price of coals, the good lady closing their connection with the shuddering pronouncement: "I should be afraid that my bread would smell of brimstone." Thus assisted to take a critical view of the practical effects of Christianity, the young polemist, with all his signal good humour, duly proceeded to develop himself, on very inadequate physical rations, as a speaker and debater on the problems which had so rudely disturbed his existence. For that task his sustenance was better than might now be supposed. At that stage he hardly knew what his opinions were; but he was in a very fair way to develop them.

An amiable remark by Mr. A. S. Headingley in his short *Life of Bradlaugh*, published in 1880, has given extended currency to a view set forth long before by compunctious Christians—the opinion, namely, that but for the unenlightened persecution of Packer the youth who had in his twenties come to be known as "Iconoclast" would probably have remained in the Christian fold. Headingley proceeded partly on Bradlaugh's own observation, in an ironical dedication of a pamphlet to Packer in 1861, that but for that cleric's action he might

not have "proceeded so far" on the path of freethought. He meant that he might not have taken to the platform. But this is not to say that he might have remained orthodox. To go to that length is to add unwarrantably to the quite sufficient official blame that justly attaches to an ecclesiastic who is biographically remembered solely for his relations with the young Bradlaugh. A boy who of his own force could at the age of fifteen, while zealously acting as a Sunday-school teacher, detect incompatibilities in the Gospels and the Articles, was not likely to remain long uninfluenced by the more stringent indictment of the current creed which was going on around him. English freethought, which began to take systematic critical form in the *Discourse of Freethinking* of Anthony Collins in 1713, and is recorded by responsible witnesses to have reached the working classes even in the age of the Restoration, became a matter of platform propaganda as early as Peter Annet, in 1739. If such polemic was overlaid in the latter half of the eighteenth century by new popular politics, it was powerfully reconstituted by Paine's *Age of Reason*, which seems to have been about as widely circulated as his *Rights of Man;* and the Radicalism of the first half of the nineteenth century went hand in hand with all manner of freethinking. The movement of Robert Owen was impregnated with it; and no one who mingled long with the Chartists could fail to meet with it there.

But it had a literature of its own. Richard Carlile, who took up the sale of Paine's works when they were being officially suppressed, and who underwent nine years' imprisonment between 1819 and 1835, was one of the most energetic of democratic publishers, putting in cheap circulation a multitude of English, French, and American treatises, with Shelley's *Queen Mab*, of which

the jurisprudence of the time refused to let the poet control the circulation. An almost continual succession of Radical and Rationalist journals, mostly of book-page size, had pushed such literature home during a quarter of a century. Meantime there had appeared in 1838 Charles Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, praised by Strauss, of which the sober documentary scrutiny was promptly assimilated by the popular propagandists. In 1846 came George Eliot's translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*.

If all this could conceivably have failed to affect a mind like that of Bradlaugh in the fifties, it is quite inconceivable that he could have remained unmoved in adolescence by the retrospect of the brutal persecution of freethinking heresy. Of him it could be said as truly as it has been said of Voltaire by Lord Morley, that cruelty and injustice were not merely offences against his principles: "they were knives to his heart." A lawyer by instinct, he loathed to see law made the tool of iniquity; and the awakening of his political faculty, which must have occurred had Packer been Dean Stanley, would have done more to make him a freethinker by rousing his wrath on behalf of the victims of official bigotry than did his own lightly taken sufferings at the hands of one priest.

For the rest, half the Church of England about 1850 consisted of Packers and men ready to acquiesce in their action, while of the other half the bulk were indifferent, leaving but a small fraction concerned to give any meaning to the Christian doctrine of love. Protest from clerics against the persecution of freethinking publicists in those days is hardly to be traced.

It is perhaps fair to suggest that the savage persecution inflicted on the plebeian publishers of Paine's works and their shopmen, and on such publicists as Houston,

Carlile, Wedderburn, Taylor, Southwell, Hetherington and G. J. Holyoake, was inspired at least as much by political as by religious feeling. The absurd doctrine that the French Revolution was wrought by religious freethought was then devoutly believed by the mass of nominally educated men, and fiercely affirmed by such a historian as Lord Mahon, afterwards Earl Stanhope. For such angry sciolists, every freethinking book was a menace to the social order. Deistical freethinkers complained that the atheists who outwent them, from d'Holbach onwards, created a special hostility to freethought in general; but the political doctrines of the devoutly theistic Paine and the republicanism of Richard Carlile probably counted for much more in the common prejudice. The same panic fear of revolution blew the bellows of malice against Shelley. On the other hand, the fact that the prosecution of Paine's publishers and others was largely carried on by the so-called Society for the Suppression of Vice, of which the pious Wilberforce was president, is one of the standing proofs of the power of religion to vitiate character. The persecutors seem never to have asked themselves whether their professed doctrine of forgiveness of enemies had anything to do with their actual lives.

The freethinkers, untouched by the hypocrisy of their foes, certainly returned blow for blow so far as words went. When invectively smitten on one cheek, they smote all the moral features of the assailant without stint; and the *Infidel's Text-Book* of Robert Cooper (1846), a collection of thirteen lectures on the Bible, is pungent reading. But the whole succession were singularly law-abiding. It is due to them to record that they saved the intellectual liberties of their country by their unyielding fortitude, "each stepping in his comrade's place the instant that he fell," from the days

when men and women filed up to sell Paine's books, under certain penalty of imprisonment, to those in which bigotry, sick of the struggle with an unsubduable breed, sullenly drew back its bruised hand. Were it not for the long crusade of the men of the people, the publication in English of the works of Hennell and Strauss, and even of Colenso, would not have been possible at the time of their composition. The fighters won freedom for the scholars.

Into their line the young Bradlaugh stepped, so to speak, by social and personal predestination, the circumstances deciding his destiny. Faithful as they to the rule of law, he cared as quixotically as they for the promulgation of truth against perceived falsity. Denied a livelihood by pious prejudice, the boy, hungry but unembittered, soberly cast about for a resort compatible with non-surrender to the incredible creed. Precocious lecturing could not avail him, though he met with ready kindness from comrades. Austin Holyoake became his attached friend; and the more famous brother, George Jacob Holyoake, took the chair for him at a lecture which undertook to grapple with the "Past, Present, and Future of Theology," in October, 1850. In those days he began to learn Hebrew with James Savage, who had begun his conversion from the faith, communicating his knowledge on the Lancastrian principle to another; studied French with another friend; and picked up also a little Greek, Latin, and Arabic. The brave and worshipful widow of Richard Carlile gave him cordial hospitality from her poor store; and he duly fell in juvenile love with her daughter Hypatia, who, being still younger, duly laughed at her boy adorer. Concerning that episode, as concerning his life in general, pious malice as duly framed vile libels. Other hospitalities, planned to give him visibly needed meals, alarmed his

self-respect; and tiny debts, accumulating, weighed upon his spirit, till at length, at the officially recorded age of "17$\frac{3}{12}$," he took the Queen's shilling and became a soldier. Even in enlisting he met with oppression, which he characteristically resisted. He had expressly enlisted for service in India, for which there was offered a bounty of £6 10s.—enough to pay his debts and leave thirty-five shillings over. But the sergeant of the East India Foot had made a deal with a sergeant of the 50th Foot, and the gaunt recruit found himself disposed of as a chattel. Making vigorous protest, he won the interest of the examining medical officer, who explained that he might compromise by choosing any other English regiment he liked. Honour being thus saved, he elected, at sight of a smart cavalryman, to be one of the 7th (Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards, then stationed in Ireland.

The news, reaching the home, drew the father to Westminster, where he obtained permission for the recruit to spend Christmas Day with his family, thus happily putting the grace of reconciliation over the breach. Father and son were not to meet again. Charles senior, grown a moody man, became a regular church-goer, gaining thereby no visible comfort; and in 1852 died after a few days of sudden and unexplained illness, aged forty-one. His employers inserted in the *Times* a notice to the effect that he had faithfully served them for upwards of twenty-two years. For himself, he had written articles on Fishing, thought worthy of reprinting about forty years after his death, and a number of small things in the *London Mirror*. But, save for the element of stedfastness, the perceptible heredity, as aforesaid, is small.

There was another brother, William Robert, twelve

years younger, who was the mother's favourite. Educated at an Orphan Asylum, he had the usual religious training, and he was never a Freethinker; but he contrived to lose one after another the situations which his brother found for him, and took to drinking, entirely neglecting his mother to the day of her death. About the end of 1872 he was sent to jail for embezzling small sums from his then employer; and Charles, who had harboured him during a long convalescence, now supported his wife, and aided him after his release, with very scant funds of his own. In 1875 William "found salvation" at the meetings of Messrs. Moody and Sankey, and employment on the *Christian Herald*. Later he figured much as a Christian Evangelist, often lecturing in the same town and on the same day as his brother, making much capital of their relationship, inviting prayer on Charles's behalf, and professing much Christian love for him, to the edification of the devout. In private he spoke of Charles with mendacious malice, living all the while and running a worthless religious journal on the strength of support earned by his relationship and his unctuous profession of piety. On these matters the elder brother always maintained a stoical silence; but the facts must be put on record in the interests of veridical biography. As a lecturer, William has been described as a bad caricature of Charles—the body without the mind. He thus enters into the heredity problem.

II

SOLDIER AND CIVILIAN

BRADLAUGH'S second large adventure in life began on the plane of rude comedy. He arrived at the transport ship for the passage to Dublin in the decayed black suit and silk hat of his frustrate vocation as a lecturer, doubtless by way of parting definitely with that attire; and he completely succeeded. The hat was promptly disposed of by his fellow recruits, who next proceeded to break open his box. Finding there a Euclid, a Greek lexicon, and a small Arabic vocabulary, they employed those articles and the hat in a miscellaneous game of football, from which the smallest volume alone was retrievable. Sea-sickness morally stilled the scene; but there ensued a storm so violent that the sea-sick and other recruits were besought by the alarmed captain to help him to move his cargo, on a promise of £5 for the party. The aid was by them successfully given; but when the storm was weathered the captain (whose nationality is not recorded) nefariously proposed to compound for his salvation by a few half-crowns to the more active men. Then, to the amazement of all, the pallid hobbledehoy of the ruined hat and lexicon, who had worked with the rest, found his sea-legs; and a broadside of declamation fitted for Trafalgar Square, ending with an awful threat to write to the *Times*, reduced the appalled and conscience-stricken mariner to speechless surrender. The hobbledehoy had at one stroke made good his footing, and at once received the grateful and penitent homage of his mates.

Barrack life in a cavalry regiment made a man of the overgrown and underfed boy. He was then a devoted teetotaller, and his comrades, bracketing that weird peculiarity with his no less strange addiction to books, dubbed him "Leaves." When, taking duty one day as cook, he served up the potatoes in an unsoftened form, they pelted him with his produce. From time to time he had to fight, like another; and the first verdict of the experts, on the occasion of his thrashing a bully, was that it was a bad thing to come in the way of Leaves's fists, but it was your own fault if you got there. In due course he became sufficiently proficient in that as in other forms of polemic. To mention that the regiment was once stationed near Donnybrook, at Fair time, is to convey that it learned to use the shillelagh. The requisite challenge from the natives was circulated in adequately offensive form; and sixteen picked men of the Seventh, of whom Bradlaugh (6ft. 1½in.) was the shortest, got a day's leave to see, and feel, the fun of the Fair. They simply fought their way from end to end, guarding their heads with their left arms and reciprocating with the right. The results, in his case, included a recurring susceptibility to erysipelas in the left arm.

In other matters Leaves was somewhat of a ringleader. The regiment was wont at one period to attend Rathmines Church, where one Sunday a Rev. Mr. Halpin preached a sermon in which he unadvisedly suggested that his thought might transcend the capacity of the rank and file. Leaves was naturally incited by his sensitive comrades to send a letter of critical retaliation, for the production of which he was only too well qualified. On the following Sunday the Seventh went prepared for further hostilities; and as soon as the hapless preacher proceeded from preliminaries to fresh impoliteness, at

a signal, three hundred dragoons unhitched their sabres and let them clash on the floor. The moral sensation was proportionate, and only the advent of the Duke of Cambridge for a review at Dublin next day averted punitive consequences for Bradlaugh. At Ballincollig he got into and out of another scrape. A landlord had closed a genuine right-of-way against soldiers and peasants; and Leaves, after proper legal inquiry, headed a party of both orders, who broke the gate, leaving on one of the bars the inscription: "Pulled up by Charles Bradlaugh, C52, VII D.G." The landlord made complaint to the commanding officer, who unsympathetically advised legal consultation, seeing that C52 generally knew what he was about; and there was no sequel save grateful supplies of dairy and other produce from the local users of the right-of-way.

Such a constitutionalist was not unapt to collide at times with military rule; and Bradlaugh had some sharp experience. In one case, when a bullying officer was having him arrested for contemptuous disregard of orders in his capacity of orderly room clerk, he escaped only because the officer had the honesty to repeat, at Bradlaugh's suggestion, the offensive terms in which he had given his commands. The colonel, agreeing with the private that "there must have been some mistake," dismissed the case. A martinet captain made matters hard for Bradlaugh afterwards; and in his autobiographic sketch, in 1873, expressing his lasting gratitude to his old colonel, the victim avowed that he had "not yet quite forgiven" his captain. But in 1889, when he lay dangerously ill, a certain general called at his lodging to leave the message that "his old captain" had inquired about him; and the sick man cast away all the old resentment. Curiously enough, the colonel was then reported to have veered into hostility. It is said that in his soldiering

'teens the youth had been helped to bear up under bullying by the friendship of James Thomson ("B.V."), who was then army schoolmaster at Ballincollig. The two very different natures, then diverging considerably in opinion, formed a close friendship, which lasted twenty-five years. The poet, it may be, steadied his friend under discipline.

It is to be avowed that at some points his observance of discipline was not strict. Not only did he often lecture on temperance to his comrades in the barrack-room at night, he confesses in his brief autobiography to have "more than once broken out of Portobello barracks to deliver teetotal speeches in the small French Street Hall, Dublin. Many times have I spoken there in my scarlet jacket, between James Haughton and the good old Father, the Rev. Dr. Spratt, a Roman Catholic priest, then very active in the cause of temperance." When, later in life, medical authority put restraint on his tea-drinking, and indicated light wines as for him the safer beverages, he forfeited some of the esteem he had won from devoted abstainers, as against theological odium.

In his three years of soldiering in Ireland the lad so learned the rights and wrongs of agrarian life there as to become the faithful friend of the Irish cause, under circumstances which would have made most men renounce it. In later life he drew a vivid picture of a hideous eviction scene of which, as a soldier, he was an impotent witness. It served to fix his vocation for politics; and when, in 1853, after his father's death, a small inheritance from an aunt made it possible for the widow to pay, as the testator had wished, the requisite £30 for his discharge, he was glad beyond measure to return to civil status. The adjutant's certificate ran that his conduct had been "extremely good." To the new adventure in life, happily, he

PRIVATE, 7TH DRAGOON GUARDS. AGED 20

Facing p. 16

brought a powerful physique, well toughened by his army training for a career that was to need a very strong man's energy, and a mind ripened in many ways. But in the photograph taken of him in his regimentals in 1853 he is still a mere chubby-faced lad, with all his inches.

He at once sought employment, but found it hard to obtain ; and the unloving mother did not spare comment. At length he found work with a solicitor, who said he had no clerkship vacant, but mentioned that he needed an office boy. The tall ex-trooper promptly offered to take *that* post, of which the salary was ten shillings a week, and he was accepted, the employer being a man of some judgment. In three months' time it had been raised to fifteen; in nine months the boy was in full charge of his employer's Common Law business at a salary of £65. The signal skill in all law procedure which he showed in his later public life was thus acquired by doing actual solicitor's work in the lower courts for a number of years. But the capacity which earned such swift promotion was another matter. The employer was so far above the average that when ardent Christians wrote in the usual way to warn him of the freethinking activities of his clerk, who had resumed lecturing, he paid no heed beyond stipulating that the business should not be allowed to suffer from the propaganda; and by lecturing under the *nom de guerre* of "Iconoclast" Bradlaugh kept the bargain. In his twenty-second year he married, having added to his office salary by becoming clerk to a Building Society. After four years he asked to have his articles, and, not being met, made an arrangement with another solicitor, who, however, got into ruinous money difficulties and involved Bradlaugh in them. Yet another attempt to become articled was made by him in 1862 ; but this attempt also came to

nothing after two years, the solicitor concerned having to give up business.

Between his bias and his luck, he was ultimately held to the stony path of his first choice. Sometimes he was headed away from it. In 1858 he became President of the London Secular Society, in succession to G. J. Holyoake, and also became editor of the *Investigator*, a freethought weekly which had been conducted by Robert Cooper. Within a year he had to give it up by reason of ill-health and pecuniary difficulties. It was at this period (1859) that he became a Freemason, as attested by the official certificate. In 1860 he started his *National Reformer* on a company basis, with a co-editor who gave him much trouble; and in 1863 ill-health caused him to devolve that task; but the death of his substitute, John Watts, brought him back in 1866, when he became President of the newly-established National Secular Society. In the intervening period, and afterwards, he strove to enter on more lucrative lines of life, without dropping either his advanced politics, home and foreign, or his advanced propaganda on religion. But his commercial schemes in the end failed. Attempts to get into city business by running a "Naples Colour Company," and in other ways, were brought to an end by the "Black Friday" of the failure of Overend Gurney and Co. in 1866, and the difficulties which followed for years. On every line of such effort he found himself more or less handicapped by his crusade against religion. Some boycotted him; some seemed to have found in his heresy a special provocation to cheat him. But it is reasonable to infer that the crusader, with all his super-abundant energy, lacked some of the forms of patience and application needed for success in business. He gave to his mental and public life much of the time and thought that the business man gives to making money;

and a predilection for the establishment of truth in doctrine and justice in politics is not in itself conducive to gain in commerce and finance. As he once avowed, he had great capacities for making money, and also great capacities for losing it. In 1867 he brought an action against the English Joint Stock Bank, then being wound up, for £12,000, agreed to be paid to him by the general manager, for negotiating the purchase of a Norwich banking business for £210,000. Vice-Chancellor Wood, expressing the highest sense of the plaintiff's honesty and ability, regretfully found that there was "no completed agreement that could be enforced." For once the lay lawyer's vigilance had failed him.

None of the vulgar vices played any part in his commercial unsuccess. The teetotaller was an affectionate, home-loving husband and father; and though in his early years of marriage his gift of friendship meant a large hospitality for his means, it was not thriftless. But the fates barred that path too. The marriage had promised as well as youth could wish, the wife being an affectionate, amiable, loyal and cordial helpmate; and James Thomson was for long years a housemate, loved by all the family. The crusader had thus for a time his share of happiness amid his struggles. But it was in the destinies that wife and friend should severally be sundered from him by the curse of dipsomania. In the wife's case it ultimately meant the complete wrecking of the home, debts on that score coinciding with losses in business and in propaganda work. Immediately on that catastrophe came the death of the only son, aged eleven, a boy of great promise. The unhappy mother, a physical wreck, went to live with her two girls at Midhurst in the house of her father, a veteran Radical, teetotaller, and freethinker, devoted to his son-in-law. To the end, in her broken spirit, she warmly loved alike children and

husband, and for some years the two girls spent alternate months with him in his poor lodgings in East London, he continuing to visit at Midhurst till all hope was gone. Where women were concerned, he was the most forbearing of men; and in the tragedy of his married life he was quite blameless. Thomson's case will be considered in another chapter.

It was long part of every-day religious apologetic, as against Bradlaugh, to say that he had been drummed out of the army; that he had deserted his wife and children; that he had caused his mother to die of a broken heart; that he was *not* married, and that his children were illegitimate. For his wife's sake he had been duly married in church. One Anglican clergyman at Tottenham, the Rev. Hugh McSorley, fatuously supposing Bradlaugh, then a Tottenham resident, to be the author of a skit in Dickens's *All the Year Round*, in which the reverend gentleman was recognizable for his neighbours, published in a local newspaper a "rejoinder" in which the atheist's wife was described as his squaw, "united by a bond unblessed by priest or parson." "But that," the reverend gentleman went on, "has an advantage: it will enable him to turn his squaw out to grass, like his friend Charles Dickens, when he feels tired of her....." Bradlaugh had no connection whatever with Dickens, with whom he was thus memorably bracketed, and had had nothing to do with the skit in Dickens's journal. Abstaining as usual from the temptation to use the horsewhip, he exacted from the newspaper proprietor and the parson long and explicit apologies (evidently dictated by him), which were printed by the former in his journal. McSorley further paid £100 (which went, minus costs, to charities), and was permitted to remain anonymous, a privilege of little local value, but useful as enabling him to continue anonymous

attacks on Bradlaugh, to the latter's knowledge, in other quarters. Yet Bradlaugh never published his name.

There are doubtless many clerical and other Christians who will now regard with disgust the doings of those militant Christian contemporaries of Bradlaugh, even in the case of McSorley, who really supposed he had a grievance, to say nothing of the multitudes who, with no shadow of personal grievance, gleefully circulated all manner of villainous libels on the strength of simple hearsay. But it is historically important to realize that all this was then in the ordinary way of orthodoxy. It is strict truth to say that the normal course of defence for "belief" against unbelief was to resort instantly to gross personal aspersion. What Packer did to the boy, millions of his fellow believers did to the man. To ruin the heretic financially, further, was generally felt to be an appointed way of doing God service, ordinary Christians being

> quite persuaded
> That all the apostles would have done as they did.

While private malice thus energized, the law of the land operated to the freethinker's undoing. In 1867 he had to bring an action, in his then capacity of dealer in bills of exchange, against one Du Rin, and was met by a deliberate attempt to burke his evidence on the score of his holding atheistic opinions. The dispute turned on the place of delivery of certain bills, and at the second stage his evidence was refused. A few days later, called as a witness in the Central Criminal Court in a libel action, he objected to swear, and was at once allowed to give evidence on affirmation! Yet again, in the next stage of his own suit, he was sent back to be sworn as to the refusal of his testimony before he could argue his point. In the end, after two years of litigation, he won it, Lord Chief Justice Cockburn remarking that the

defendant had no merits in the case, and had relied on a "somewhat unrighteous" plea. But the Christian defendant went bankrupt, so that the atheist lost his debt of £360 and his costs—£150. The Evidence Amendment Act of 1869 was passed in view of the legal confusion the case had revealed; but Bradlaugh had no compensation.

The most piquant aspect of the matter is that the religious generation which thus fought one who, without malice towards believers as such, criticized their creed and their Sacred Books, found its best avowable weapon in a charge against him of coarseness and excessive violence of language. It was quite false; his attack was amenity itself in contrast with the defence. Journal files, books, and pamphlets can supply the test. The plain fact was that *all* open criticism of a creed irrationally and ignorantly held was spontaneously felt to be "blasphemous," and blind anger at once took charge of the proceedings. Some people are still so intellectually confused as to argue that he who rigorously criticizes a creed and its books has shown himself "intolerant," and so earns just persecution. It is therefore still necessary to explain that intolerance, rationally defined, consists in malice against persons *because of their opinions*, not in (*a*) hostility to opinions or doctrines as such, or in (*b*) strictures upon any because of their actions as such. The most stringent criticism of his own doctrines and opinions never awoke in Bradlaugh a spark of malice. It was doubtless trying to ill-disciplined believers to see the "inspired" ethics of their "revealed" books mercilessly exposed in their manifold deformities, and the structure of fable and documentary fraud made bare; but that was the inevitable sequence of their own tactic. If the believer were content honestly to stick to the problem of truth

of record and doctrine, he would have spared himself the exposure of the historic sins of his Church.

It is open, of course, to the dispassionate onlooker, hight Gallio, to say that Bradlaugh knew what he was doing when he chose to be a life-long crusader against established creeds. He knew how religions *did* fight, and he challenged one to combat. It is quite true. An avowed republican, Malthusian, and heretic, he had before him the record of the life of Richard Carlile, who, flying those colours, spent nine years in jail for doing so. He knew he could wield legal weapons which Carlile had lacked; but he knew also that he entered on a path which meant no ease; and if the suffering outwent anything he had anticipated he never whined. Through all he loved his own land, thought it the best, and never reviled it. Even in the matter of criticism of English shortcomings he never indicted it as Mill habitually did: seeking to make England freer, he knew she was nearer freedom than the continental peoples whose rebels he helped and befriended. His course was, in a word, that of one who, inheriting as his national birthright a great ideal and a great tradition, strove intensely to move his countrymen to live up to their best standards.

III

ANTI-RELIGION

QUESTIONED towards the close of his life as to his retrospective view of the total expediency of his crusade against religion, Bradlaugh lightly said something to the effect that if he were to begin over again he might not take up his position on the house-tops. It was an avowal of the common doubt of an ageing fighter, conscious of having wasted much strength, as to whether he might not have used it more economically, with much more ease and lucre for himself. Of course it lay in the nature of the man and the case that he simply could not in his pioneer days see things in that light. To have been a prudential propagandist or non-propagandist he would have had to be "hatched over again and hatched different," though, as he told Packer, the latter was his determinant in taking the first and decisive plunge. Bradlaugh spent himself in assailing alike religious delusion and political injustice because they were alike repellent to his mind, morals, and temper. But in his last years, when he so rapidly won new popularity without recanting anything, he cannot have failed to wonder sometimes whether he might not have got more solid satisfaction out of life by devoting himself to money-making, popular politics, and fishing, and keeping his opinions to himself. Men who have taken a course like his can perhaps best realize, on retrospect, the possibility of the doubt. The question once put to him in the House of Commons smoking-room by a genial

Conservative Q.C.—"Good God, Bradlaugh, what does it matter whether there is a God or not?"—was one which he did not seek seriously to answer, and its point was by him humorously appreciated.

A Rationalist who broadly contemplates the planet as a pin-cushion studded with a billion fanes, of which the individual creeds, upon collation, constate the utter futility of all, may fitly ask himself whether it is the course of prudence to kick against that infinity of pricks. If it is in the nature of the mass of men collectively to be more rabidly certain of the absolutely unknown, in all manner of absurd representation, than they take the trouble to be over anything knowable outside of the daily round, the thoughtful egoist might intelligibly decide to leave them alone. Those who nevertheless go about to expose in whole or in part the delusion as they see it—the Voltaires, the Paines, the Bradlaughs, and their followers—do so because of their altruism, their humanitarianism, their craving to enlighten their fellows. They reckon, of course, that the enlightenment will make for better life all round. It is a postulate of all freethinking that it makes at once for political freedom, for quicker advance in knowledge, and for better conduct.

Bradlaugh's work for freethought was thus the counterpart of his work in politics. Like Voltaire and Paine, he sought to inform the plain man: his main audience was among the British working folk and the intelligent, as distinct from the scholarly, middle classes. Unlike the other two, he was mainly a man of the platform, where his most signal endowment gave him an unmatched power. The great mass of his writings are pamphlets which condense lectures or courses of lectures; and in the writing he never thought of giving a literary habiliment or embellishment in place of the shining armour of vivid oratory with which he had clothed them

in delivery. The pamphlets, though occasionally humorous, were penned to give an enduring basis to the impression wrought by the spoken word. In sheer Titanic oratorical power he was quite unequalled in the England of his day. In the bulk of his writing he was content to be a working pamphleteer. But in 1877 he and Mrs. Besant produced a *Freethinker's Text-Book* in two parts, of which he did the first, divided into two sections: "Man: Whence and How?", "Religion, What and Why?"; and thence may be gathered his general philosophy of things. The first section dealt with the Biblical cosmology, anthropology, and zoology, opposing to them the results of modern science, which on this side he had studied with all the zest given to the problem by freethinkers in the sixties and seventies.

Some readers at the present day, when even popular Christianity is to a large extent grown in effect Unitarian and "unscriptural," would doubtless demur to the preliminary position, taken from the orthodox Sir William Jones, that "Either the first eleven chapters of Genesis, all due allowance being made for a figurative Eastern style, are true, or the whole fabric of our national religion is false." But the eclectic Christians of to-day should remember that in that period most of their co-believers really held the historic Christian faith, and either believed or wanted to believe in the Bible records which they had received as supernaturally revealed truth, and which are still so imposed upon the young in the schools by the connivance of many who know them to be fabulous. Bradlaugh and his co-workers actually wanted to deliver the masses from what they held to be demonstrated delusion as to the history of the world and mankind. At the same time they attacked, in their later and more philosophic form, the beliefs in deity which had been established for the modern world by the fabulous

records, but which the philosophers strove to recast in more or less complete disregard of the Biblical presentment. The section on Religion is a closely and exactly reasoned discussion of Christian theistic philosophy, drawing on many writers on both sides, down to the latest anti-theism made current in the *Westminster Review*. In sum, it exhibited the design argument as a mere *non sequitur*, and ontology as a chimera.

Bradlaugh's own atheism was simply the logical completion of Spinoza's pantheism, concerning which, in a masterly lecture on Spinoza, he declared that he diverged from that great thinker at the point at which he "ascribed mode to the infinite"; and a capable Scottish clergyman who heard the lecture pronounced that Bradlaugh's position was logically reached on Spinoza's premises. Heine called pantheism a "timid atheism." Bradlaugh would never have applied the disparaging adjective to Spinoza, whose memory he revered as that of a great truth-lover; but he knew very well that the pantheism which Heine himself finally put in the formula, "God is all there is," came logically to the same thing as atheism. Holding that the term "God," when thus employed, is a mere denaturalization of the concepts attached to it by the vast majority of all who have ever used it, he was incapable of taking shelter behind the word. Some people who watched his immensely skilful use of legal technique in his many legal struggles accused him of readiness to quibble. In simple fact, he used law as the trained lawyer does, fighting by the received rules as he played chess. But he never regarded philosophy as a game of chess. He was not a "philosophical sceptic," like the Montaigne of the *Apologie*, or the Pascal of the *Pensées*, or Bishop Huet, or Mr. Balfour: he built not on Hume but on Spinoza; and it is remarkable how little use he makes of

the greatest of British philosophers. One of his first published essays was a tract on Descartes, which he contributed to a series entitled "Half-Hours with Freethinkers," Descartes being for him memorable in that aspect no less than as the philosophical starting-point of Spinoza. Hume perhaps repelled him by his temporizing attitude to theism; though neither is Descartes invulnerable in respect of his conformities. Starting from Spinoza, Bradlaugh became a modern Monist, and his atheism is summed up in the proposition that theism is dualism, against which atheism and not pantheism is the honest negative for purposes of sincere debate.

It ought not to be difficult now for any thinking man to realize the meaning and the grounds of atheism, though there is still an infinity of unintelligent comment on the term. When freethinkers in the eighteenth and previous centuries realized the incredibility of "revelation" as such and of the Christian legend, they normally fell back on deism, which is in no philosophic sense different from theism so-called, save insofar as modern theism strives to adjust itself to modern science. That is to say, they took for granted, with Bacon, that the universe is "not without a mind"; that it must have a Moral Governor, and must have had a Creator. It was not till science had somewhat opened up the infinite cosmic vistas that such conceptions ceased to seem the obvious verdict of common sense. Voltaire and Paine, vehement theists both, so held it; and it was the modern perspective, no less than philosophical logic, that enabled Bradlaugh and many of his contemporaries to discard altogether the anthropomorphic solution which is the root or essence of all religion. They did not, as conventional orthodoxy supposes, proceed to find the Cosmos totally intelligible as a mere "mechanical process," ruled by "chance." They had learned, from Hume, or other-

wise, that "chance" is an utterly meaningless expression in reference to the universe of things, and they had seen that "mechanical" is a term of dialectic trickery. For them the universe was a much more stupendous thing than it had been for the religious mind, primitive, Hebrew, Pagan, or Christian; and it was as an inconceivably stupendous All that they saw it to be utterly incompressible into theistic formulas, even when these had been stretched from the barbaric Hebraic into a Newtonian wording. They put aside theism not because they did not find the universe a mystery, but because they found theism a merely childish attempt to explain the mystery; an attempt, too, involving a perpetual clash between morality and theology, even when the latter is detached from the sacred books.

In and since his day, many men holding substantially the same positions, and choosing to avoid the popular odium attaching to the term "atheism," have made use of the label of Agnosticism,[1] invented by Huxley. Some of those who prefer that denominative have indicated the opinion that it involves a position logically different from Bradlaugh's; but this is a logical confusion. One of the current verbalisms on the subject, put in currency by J. S. Mill's account of his father's views, is that "dogmatic atheism" is as untenable as theism. But "dogmatic atheism" is a mere countersense. It is an ignorant blunder to describe the educated atheist as saying "There is no God." The full title of Bradlaugh's philosophic section is "Religion: What and Why? or God = *X*." As he said a hundred times, to "deny the existence of God" is to be meaningless. What he did was to deny the existence of any one of the alleged

[1] This in turn evoked from Christian wit the comment that Agnostic = Ignoramus.

beings that had been described to him in definitions of the term "God." As he pointed out, every theist denies the existence of the beings alleged in all definitions save his own: the atheist simply rejects one definition more, arguing that every one in turn posits or involves a contradiction in terms. In the popular phrase, the latest theist "denies the existence" of a million Gods so-called: the atheist "denies the existence" of the million *plus* one. The very phrase is an inane *petitio principii*, and as such Bradlaugh always disclaimed and repudiated it.

In the opinion of some of us, his procedure at this point compares favourably with that of Spencer, who, writing his *First Principles*, as he avows, to forestall hostility on the score of "materialism," misrepresented atheism in order to repudiate it, yet never succeeded in escaping denunciation as godless and materialistic. Atheism, according to Spencer, professes to explain the universe. If this characterization applies to any historic form of atheism, it certainly does not apply to Bradlaugh's, which expressly affirmed that the universe, being held infinite, cannot be explained. That is, in sum, the position of the agnostic, who, however, is prone to claim that he merely says "I don't know," and that the atheist goes further. It is not so. The agnostic, unless he is merely making an autobiographical avowal without pretence to a philosophic doctrine, implicitly says to the theist, "You don't know"—"your alleged knowledge is wholly imaginary." Which is just atheism.

Part of the self-excusal of those religious and other persons who stood aside unsympathetically or antipathetically from Bradlaugh's great parliamentary struggle took the form of the plea that he had gratuitously earned hostility by taking up his "extreme" position and by using extreme language. But the orthodox people who, arguing thus, suppose that if they had

lived in his day they would have discriminated between him and "moderate" heretics, "know not what spirit they are of." In Bradlaugh's youth, language of the grossest opprobrium was used by instructed men against all theists who ever so temperately impugned the received Biblical beliefs. Hugh Miller, himself accused of "infidelity" for believing in geology at all, called the theists and politicians who outwent him "vermin" and "reptiles," and described as "degraded and lost" those who accepted the evolution doctrine put forward before Darwin by Robert Chambers in his *Vestiges of Creation*. Yet there was not a shadow of irreverence in Chambers. Whewell tells in a letter of the "contempt and abhorrence with which Owen and Sedgwick speak of the *Vestiges*." Contempt and abhorrence, in fact, constituted the average Christian attitude towards the mere *opinion*, independently of the mode of its expression. For Christian professors, as for the Hoxton baker's wife, anything "infidel" conveyed a smell of brimstone.

When, then, Lord Morley, in his admirable *Life of Gladstone*, inserted in his curt account of Bradlaugh the odd sentence, "Blank negation could go no further," he conveyed, if any clear impression at all, a mistaken one. Lord Morley, with his high mastery of his mother tongue, has probably realized long ago that the "blank" of his sentence is a blank cartridge of diction. It might at a pinch serve to characterize allusively his own procedure in spelling "God" with a small "g" throughout his brilliant work on Voltaire. Despite his somewhat cryptic aspersion of the deism of the eighteenth century in the mass as "godless," his typographical device seemed open to only one interpretation—to wit, that the God of current belief is as strictly a fabulous figure as the Gods of the heathen, to whom Christians deny the capital letter. That, if anything, might be called a

"blank" negation, in the sense of the phrase "a blank denial," a negative without explanations. Bradlaugh could not well "go further" than his critic, but his method was in comparison discursive, ratiocinative, and expository, and he always used the capital G. He had, as Lord Morley avows, "a strong love of truth according to his lights," his lights being the necessary measure of his perceptions, as Gladstone's and Lord Morley's and everybody else's lights are the measures of theirs. Bradlaugh, however, had sought light on religion and philosophy rather more strenuously and employed it not less competently than did any of his contemporaries whose lives were largely devoted to politics. His metaphysic, though much sounder than Spencer's, like that of greater thinkers was open to criticism; and some of his friends dissented from it at points. But the facile assumption of some, "unexercised and unbreathed" in the dialectic conflict, that Bradlaugh was unqualified because of the nature of his career, is one of the fallacies of academic self-complacency. To Lord Morley's summary there may fitly be made the addendum that Bradlaugh was a far more competent thinker on the main philosophic problem than nine out of ten of his colleagues in Parliament. The late Professor Flint was probably more familiar than Lord Morley with the intricacies of the theistic debate, and it was after being criticized by Bradlaugh that he wrote:—

> There is an impression in some quarters that atheism is advocated in a weak and unskilful manner by the chiefs of Secularism. It is an impression which I did not share. Most of the writers who are striving to diffuse atheism in literary circles are not to be compared in intellectual strength with either Mr. Holyoake or Mr. Bradlaugh.[1]

[1] *Anti-Theistic Theories*, 4th ed., p. 517.

As a monist he was necessarily a determinist, like Hobbes, Locke, Hartley, Hume, and the German philosophers who admit the scientific necessity of that view while framing incogitable verbal formulas to "save the face" of popular morals, supposed to be endangered by the philosophic truth. Bradlaugh knew his fellow-men too well to believe that morality is to be advanced by abracadabras; and he composedly faced the vituperation that has formed the bulk of the intuitionist answer to determinism, from Butler's day to ours. That vituperation proceeds in equal disregard of the fact that Augustine, Calvin, Luther, and Knox were theological determinists, and of the patent truth that the normal belief in a meaningless "free-will" counts for less than nothing in the average of conduct. Bradlaugh, accordingly, was accused of undermining morals by the same theologians who execrated him for pointing out, with Reimarus and Voltaire, that the Bible puts forward, in the person of David as "the Psalmist," the worst model of human conduct ever set up as divinely approved. There is something astonishing, on retrospect, in the undeviating unreason with which the champions of "revelation" in those days defied every form of rational criticism of their positions; flouting alike the challenge of philosophy and that of simple good sense craving for a better ethic than that of the sacred books. The next generation of ecclesiastics was to find something like safety in the Higher Criticism, which reduced their sacred books to supposititious and interpolated documents, subject accordingly to discrimination and rectification. But it was mainly for representing those very documents as fallible human compositions that Bradlaugh was by their predecessors so well hated.

To-day, doubtless, many will explain that Bradlaugh and his work ought not to be termed anti-religious. It

has been the experience of some later freethinkers to be told by tolerant Christians or theists that they are in reality very religiously minded, by which it is meant that they are disinterested, honest, and earnest. But it is not for amiable sentiment to determine the current value of words. For Bradlaugh, as for exact thinkers in general, religion meant supernaturalism, as it did for Comte till he saw fit to invent a so-called religion of his own. Those who will may fight over the counters; the historic term will still suffice for those who care to record the realities of the strife.

IV

POLITICS

In Bradlaugh's youth, popular politics ran much to drastic constitutional reconstruction. The establishment of the American and French Republics by revolution had evoked in England no serious revolutionary movement: revolution would have been especially difficult had it been tried, precisely because the country had a system of representative government; but for the same reason the reformers were not revolutionary, however advanced were their doctrines. The reforms they demanded were to come through Parliament. So savage was the reaction against the French Revolution, however, that the simple reform of the English franchise, which had been agitated for before 1789, could not be even imperfectly effected till 1832, and then with immense difficulty. Under even that settlement, nine electorates with 165,000 voters returned twenty members, while ten pocket boroughs with 2,600 voters in all returned as many. Inevitably the republican rationalism of Paine and his successors held its ground among the ill-paid, ill-fed, and unenfranchised workers; and the Chartist organization, which did not profess republicanism, pressed a programme of six points of theoretic constitutionalism—equal electoral districts, manhood suffrage, the ballot, annual parliaments, payment of members, and abolition of the property qualification. Formally instituted in 1838 by the Working Men's Association, the movement for the People's Charter virtually collapsed in 1848.

All this had happened before the boy Bradlaugh set foot on his life's main path. An attempt made in 1850 by Holyoake and others to combine the disrupted Chartist leaders into a new organization came to nothing. There remained on the scene the voluntary Socialism of Robert Owen, dubbed pre-scientific by the pseudo-scientific Marxians of the next half-century. In that movement Holyoake had been a missionary; and upon its inspiration he afterwards laboured for the building-up of co-operative trading, which has since grown to such signal dimensions. Bradlaugh, realizing, as so many political Radicals of his day did, the Utopian character of Owen's ideal, while highly honouring the great old optimist, turned to political Radicalism, with republicanism as ultimate political objective. As early as 1859 he was noted, in the agitation against the futile Reform Bill proposed by the Government in that year, as "a youthful orator who seemed a great favourite with the noisier Democrats" at a great London meeting, reported by the *Times*. That propaganda he vigorously continued, combining it, however, with an enthusiastic advocacy of republicanism for a good many years. This too was relatively Utopian, for one who came to be in a very high degree a practical politician. In England republicanism is an ideal for the young; and in Bradlaugh's youth it was bound up on the one hand with the Paine tradition and the political and personal disrepute of the third and fourth Georges, and on the other with sympathy for the French republican push of 1848 and detestation of Napoleon III. If Bradlaugh could fairly be charged with over-violence of language in any direction, it was in his *Impeachment of the House of Brunswick;* in which connection his attitude is best to be understood by remembering how the Conservative Thackeray spoke in *The Four Georges*, and that George

Eliot in her youth wrote of the fourth as "that royal hog." Towards Louis Napoleon Bradlaugh always avowed a bitter animosity; *le sang de mes amis*, he quoted, *était sur son âme*. Again it is to be remembered how Swinburne, in 1873, could exult that "the Dog is dead." There were well-hated emperors before Wilhelm II.

Bradlaugh in those days was much associated with movements for freedom abroad. Mazzini, the theist, whom he met in 1859, was one of his heroes; and for the Italian cause he laboured personally, carrying letters for Mazzini from Italy when his Italian business venture took him there. In 1870 Mazzini took the Prussian side, and Bradlaugh the French, and they never met again. In 1860 Bradlaugh delivered a series of lectures in aid of Garibaldi, which yielded a hundred guineas; and among the few letters he preserved was one from the Italian hero thanking him for his services. In the American Civil War his sympathies were all for the North; and we have his testimony, as well as that of Herbert Spencer, to the fact that the feeling of the great mass of the English people went the same way, despite a contrary impression on the part of many Americans who attended only to the attitude of the English aristocracy.

Bradlaugh's work for the Italian cause had been done in the teeth of organized Catholic opposition, which enlisted, for purposes of physical violence, many Irish labourers, chorussing for "God and Rome"; but in home politics he remained warmly sympathetic with Irish nationalism, as with that of Italy and Poland; and men who afterwards were to be indicted as Fenian leaders sought his advice at a certain juncture. The details of that episode, however, he abstained from publishing when he wrote of it in 1873; and he did not

later break silence. All that he privately conveyed was that he drafted a Proclamation of the Irish Republic for the "Provisional Government" in 1867; but that it was altered after leaving his hands. In 1868 he wrote in a pamphlet on the Irish Question that, holding republicanism to be the best form of government, he yet thought the people of England and of Ireland still "too much wanting in true dignity and independence, and too ignorant of their political rights and duties," to make good republicans. Forcible separation he pronounced quite impracticable; and he expressly disclaimed belief in revolutions effected only by arms. He was, nevertheless, systematically shadowed by the police at that period. His constant public appeal, in the face of the passion aroused by the Manchester and Camberwell outrages of 1867, which he earnestly condemned, was for conciliatory reforms—a complete reform in the land laws, disestablishment of the State Church, encouragement of industry, and the appointment of a Commission of selected Irishmen, with some eminent English judges, to examine into Irish grievances. Gladstone's policy in 1869 and 1870 followed substantially those lines, and in 1868 he acknowledged with cordial approval a copy of Bradlaugh's Irish pamphlet—the only communication its author had ever received from him up to 1880. In his journal Bradlaugh promoted the formation of an "Ireland Society" for the development of sounder public opinion on Irish affairs; and he lectured at Dublin with much acceptance under the auspices of the Irish Reform League.

As regarded France, his sympathies were fully released after Sedan; and he at once proceeded to organize, with some co-operation from Dr. Congreve, Professor Beesly, and other leading English Positivists, a series of public meetings by way of enlisting English feeling for diplo-

matic intervention in the French interest. A brilliant Frenchwoman, the Comtesse de Brimont, was credited with inspiring him to the effort, which inevitably came to nothing. But from Gambetta and the Defence Government in October, 1870, and from the French Chargé d' Affaires in February, 1871, he received warm thanks.

Naturally, his main political work was to be done at home; and in the two middle decades of the century he was a popular educator in Radicalism, with a strong flavour of Republicanism. To the League for Parliamentary Reform, established in 1865, of which he was one of the Vice-Presidents, he rendered untold and absolutely unpaid service, for which, when he resigned his position on the executive, he received very strongly expressed acknowledgments from the President and Secretary. Bright, who at that time was the bogey of the London Clubs and the Whiggish Liberals in respect of his franchise agitation, had behind him the large part of the population left unenfranchised; and it was to that mass that Bradlaugh mainly addressed himself.

Not till 1868 did he venture to stand as a parliamentary candidate for Northampton, a two-seated constituency, where, from the moment of forming that purpose, he had spoken solely on political questions. Even the Reform Act of 1867 left multitudes of the poorer workers voteless; and this was notably the case at Northampton. In a huge meeting in the open market only one hand went up against him; and at the hustings on the nomination day the Mayor declared the show of hands to be for Gilpin and Bradlaugh, as against Lord Henley, the Whig; but when it came to the polling he was well beaten. He was, in fact, already the target of general orthodox obloquy; and as the election campaign lasted five months all the hostile forces had ample time to

operate. Only three newspapers in all England had a friendly word for the Iconoclast. Mr. Levy, in his *Daily Telegraph*, shuddered over the possibilities of a time "when Englishmen will revile the sublime moralities of the *New* Testament." Stuart Mill created a sensation and a scandal by sending £10 to Bradlaugh's election fund, with a note expressing confidence that the candidate "would not contest any place where by so doing he would risk the return of a Tory in the room of a supporter of Mr. Gladstone and of the disendowment of the Irish Church." The Radical candidate had, in fact, repeatedly offered to let a representative meeting of Liberal electors settle the question; but the sitting Liberal member, though personally very friendly, felt bound to coalesce with his Whig colleague, Lord Henley; and John Bright, appealed to by an elector for guidance, briefly recommended that those two should be supported. Whereupon the *Saturday Review* exulted that Mr. Bright had counteracted Mr. Mill. Gladstone, similarly consulted, gave similar advice; and the hearty support of the Irish Reform League of that day was no countervailing factor. The natural upshot was that whereas the old Liberal member polled 2,600, the Whig 2,100, and the Tories respectively 1,600 and 1,300, Bradlaugh's figure was somewhere about 1,070.

Religious animosity, taking inventive forms in harmony with early tradition and the practice of all ages, had been particularly active against him. An idiotic story (current against freethinkers long before him) of his having publicly defied Omnipotence to strike him dead within five minutes while he held his watch, obtained general credence among antipathetic Christians, and served for political confutation. Yet even at that stage only a small minority of his Northampton supporters were freethinkers; and when by accession of support he later won the seat the

proportion was probably less than a tenth. By way of consolation, in 1868 he received from working women of Northampton a gold pencil-case, subscribed for by their pence. It may be that this had reference to his constant support of the enfranchisement of women. Long afterwards his famous colleague, Henry Labouchere (who was very much of the contrary way of thinking on woman suffrage), told him that if women had the vote he, Bradlaugh, would be thrown out; to which he replied that he was not quite sure on the point, but that in any case it was no reason for changing his opinion.

In 1868 Bradlaugh stood for everything that was "awful" in the eyes of English propriety. When the political Radicalism of Bright could move professed Liberals towards "fusion" with Tories, the all-round Radicalism of the professed "Iconoclast" was a thing of horror. In 1866 the *Times*, indulging in the blackguardism which then and long afterwards was reckoned licit in respectable English journals, had declared, àpropos of the activities of the League for franchise reform, that if Bradlaugh and Holyoake had their way "there would be an end of the institution of marriage, and communism with all its abominations would be established among us." Bradlaugh was so little of a Communist that he had not even been an Owenite; and his Neo-Malthusianism was expressly addressed to the encouragement of early marriage. But Matthew Arnold, impressed by the eloquence of the *Times*, thought fit to write in his *Culture and Anarchy* in 1868 of "Mr. Bradlaugh, the Iconoclast, who seems to be almost for baptizing us all in blood and fire into his new social dispensation," and estimated him as "evidently capable of running us all into great dangers and confusions." The apostle of culture had not yet written of "the fairy tale of Three Lord Shaftesburys"; and though he taught of "force till right is ready," the

episode of the breaking of the Hyde Park railings in 1866 had stirred his sensitive spirit to the point of demanding the application of his Christian father's counsel that "the old Roman way" with rioters was always the right one: "Flog the rank and file and fling the ringleaders[1] from the Tarpeian Rock." It is edifying to remember that the academic advocate of the lash and the Tarpeian Rock for a London crowd who broke down the Hyde Park railings when they thought themselves illegally excluded, and who thus for his own part interpreted the principle of "force till right is ready," had in the same essay been admonishing Bradlaugh, from the revered page of Bishop Wilson, to remember that "Intemperance in talk makes a dreadful havoc in the heart." As against the classico-Christian brutality of the distinguished academics, father and son, it may be interesting to note the political teaching that Bradlaugh was actually giving in 1868. It is to be gathered from his election address, which promised independent support to the new Liberal party that was expected to be led by Gladstone in the coming Parliament, in so far as its policy was consistent with the following objects:—

1. Compulsory National Education.
2. Abolition of the laws of primogeniture and entail, cheapening of the sale of land, and security for improvements by agricultural tenants.
3. Radical retrenchment in national expenditure.
4. A readjustment of taxation, making its incidence relatively heavier on accumulated wealth and large estates.[2]

[1] As it happened, there were no ringleaders. Beales, the President of the Reform League, and Bradlaugh had alike striven to prevent any semblance of rioting; and it was in the absence of all leaders that the crowd, excluded from Hyde Park by a silly proclamation, broke down the then small and weak railings and entered. Even then they carefully respected the flower-beds, by the testimony of an ex-Commissioner of Works.

[2] In 1872 we find Bradlaugh calling for "power to deprive holders

5. Legal equality for capital and labour, with Conciliation Courts for trade disputes, and the removal of such disputes from the jurisdiction of the unpaid magistracy.

6. Complete separation of Church and State, including the exclusion of Bishops from legislative functions.

7. Provision for the representation of minorities (*i.e.*, Proportional Representation, of which Bradlaugh was an early advocate).

8. Abolition of all disabilities for speculative opinion.

9. A system of life peerages, to be conferred only for great national services; proxy voting by peers to be abolished, and habitual absentees to be deprived of legislative privileges.

10. The establishment of a "National Party" in the place of that led by aristocratic Whiggism.

To this terrible programme, with its occult menace of "blood and fire," Bradlaugh added views of penal reform which seem to have been specially alarming to Arnold. He not only would not have consented to flog a whole London crowd for breaking down park railings, or even to hang their ringleaders (as Christian equivalent for the Tarpeian Rock); he was opposed alike to capital punishment and to flogging, even in cases of real crime. Later, in Parliament, he was warmly active for the abolition of the lash in the Army. He had seen men flogged.

of cultivable lands of their property, on proof of non-cultivation, at a compensation not exceeding seven years' purchase.....Such lands to be taken by the State, and let in small holdings....." Some proposal of this kind may have alarmed Arnold in 1868. But in 1872, when by the admission of the *Times* his supporters formed the majority at a land-reform meeting in Exeter Hall, Edward Russell, in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, wrote that "In this world it is necessary to do good, even if the devil bids you; and if Mr. Bradlaugh can get the ear and the vote of a vast meeting by turning half measures into whole ones, his alliance will have to be accepted, and perhaps his advice may have to be followed." To his advocacy of compulsory cultivation Bradlaugh always adhered.

The difficulty about Arnold at times is to be sure whether he had in any sense seen anything.

In 1869 an invitation to Bradlaugh to stand for Southwark was backed by "an overwhelming majority" at a selection meeting at which George Odger, officially invited, was unable to be present; but when Odger later announced his willingness to stand, Bradlaugh at once withdrew in his favour. Odger was beaten where Bradlaugh would probably have succeeded. In 1870 he came newly to the front with his effort for France; and in 1871 he incurred a new storm of opprobrium by expressing the hope that, by the advent of a republic, the then Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VII, should be prevented from becoming King. It was a bad miscalculation, based on the wave of republicanism then visible; and when in later years the Prince, whose gifts as a man of the world were already beyond dispute, expressed to Labouchere a genial wish to meet his former assailant, the latter confessed that only his recollection of his own language caused him to decline the honour. But republican unpopularity was quaintly balanced by the discovery that, when Gladstone at his famous Blackheath meeting in 1871 avowedly quoted from a "questionable book" lines which by his avowal contained "much good sense," the homespun verse in question was from a *Secularist's Manual*, to which Bradlaugh had contributed a preface.

Meantime, he went on with all his many fights for a free Press, for the right of freethinkers to affirm, for freethought, and for land law reform. In March, 1868, he had been called upon by the Disraeli Government to conform to the law by which all *cheap* newspapers were held bound to give money securities against the publication of blasphemy or sedition in their columns, and to pay £20 for each copy of his paper, which had always

been published in disregard of the Act. He formally declined, and in due course was officially sued for owning and publishing his paper, sold "at a less price than sixpence—to wit, twopence." Most of the stalwarts of the battle for a free Press—James Watson, Richard Moore, C. D. Collet, Edward Truelove, and others—rallied to the defence. As usual, the Crown lawyers bungled their business; and Bradlaugh, fighting his own case against their array, secured from the Court of Exchequer an order compelling them to give fuller particulars of the Statutes founded on, which forced the avowal that they relied on the obnoxious Act of 1819. Bradlaugh then put in four pleas in defence; and the ill-starred Crown officials committed the fresh blunder of arguing that he was limited to pleading "Not Guilty." Again, after much pother, Bradlaugh won his point; and when the day came for the trial the Attorney-General dropped the prosecution by the ignominious device of not "praying a tales" when only ten jurymen were forthcoming.

In that strategic retreat may be divined the worldly wisdom of Disraeli. Gladstone, on the other hand, was ill advised enough in 1869 to let his Government renew the prosecution, which for years had been demanded by such oracles of religion as the *Saturday Review*. This time the jury was again deficient, but "a tales" was "prayed." Baron Bramwell gave a verdict for the Crown, though again the Attorney-General was exhibited by Bradlaugh as talking some bad law. The invincible litigant moved for a new rule, and got one from the Exchequer Court on three points. If he succeeded in maintaining either of two, the prosecution was at an end; if only the third, a new trial would be necessary. The chastened Solicitor to the Inland Revenue thereupon intimated that the Treasury was prepared to repeal the

old laws involved, and that "the Law Officers of the Crown will agree to a *stet processus* being entered," if Bradlaugh would. To avoid further costs he did, protesting formally that he had not been liable under the Statutes cited, and that a Liberal Government ought never to have entered on such a prosecution. Mill sent him congratulations from Avignon; but the Government would not pay his costs, which, as usual, were in excess of the fund raised to meet them. It is not generally remembered that in this fashion Gladstone had done something to provoke the Nemesis that came upon him when, in 1880, the Bradlaugh case was hung round the neck of his Ministry. The forced repeal of the Security Laws, freeing the whole Press, stands finally to the credit of Bradlaugh, and not of the Liberal Government. Only one London journal gave him support.

In 1873 Bradlaugh was in the United States on a promising lecturing tour when there came the news that Parliament was to be dissolved, and he had to renounce, at heavy loss, his outstanding engagements in order to get back at once for the election. He could not arrive in time, and, though in his absence his cause was strenuously supported by friends, he was again beaten, though this time a Tory headed the poll, and the Whig, Lord Henley, had only 1,796 votes, to 1,653 for Bradlaugh. He was about to return to the States when Mr. Gilpin, who had been second on the poll, died. Bradlaugh had offered to let Gilpin decide whether or not he should withdraw from the constituency to avert further trouble; and Gilpin had been anxious for an accommodation; but nothing had been done; and again he fought the seat. This time one Conservative and one Whig competed with him; and the Whig, a Mr. William Fowler, fought him by means of the watch story and cognate weapons. Odger, for whom he had stood aside at Southwark, and

who had similarly refused to stand against Bradlaugh, gave his help, as did many others; but in vain. This time the Tory, who had failed in 1873, won the vacant seat, the Whig coming second with 1,836, and Bradlaugh third with 1,766. Radical Northampton was represented by two Tories; Bradlaugh returned to the States to meet his engagements, but only to incur a bad breakdown of health and further loss; and not till 1880 was he to win election as a result, among other things, of the enfranchisement of some thousands of his supporters through the instrumentality of a Co-operative Building Society.

V

ADVENTURES AND CONFLICTS

ADVENTURES are to the adventurous; and for Bradlaugh, whose life was one prolonged crusade, minor conflicts formed the intermediate tissue. One of his first skirmishes after he had left the army was fought on behalf of a group of poor men who had clubbed their savings to build a Working Men's Hall in Hackney. Acting without legal advice, they built it on freehold ground without any lease or conveyance from the freeholder, who accordingly claimed the building as his property. They then went to Bradlaugh for gratis advice, such as he gave ungrudgingly to the last day of his life. There being no remedy under the Statute of Frauds, he advised them to offer a penalty rent of £20 a year. "This being refused," he writes, "I constituted myself into a law court; and, without any riot or breach of the peace, with the assistance of a hundred stout men" he caused every brick of the building to be taken away, dividing the materials, as far as possible, among the true owners. The freeholder, as it happened, had invested a few pounds to encourage the others; and this sum he fitly lost.

The episode illustrates a gift, sometimes exemplified in his later life, for eking out law with honest force when law failed at a pinch, or was turned to iniquity. Once, in those early days, acting for his legal employer, he removed by force certain business books which their owner refused to give up according to contract; and the latter gave him in custody on a charge of "stealing the books."

The charge was not followed up; but Bradlaugh brought an action for false imprisonment, and won it with £30 damages, upon which sum he married and set up house. It was his destiny to win many larger sums as damages from libellers; but in this case alone did he pocket the money, his other compensations all going to "charity" in the shape of the Masonic Boys' School. Freemasons on that score would seem to owe some little gratitude to his memory.

Another episode of 1855 possesses a larger historical interest. A Government Bill was introduced to penalize heavily the open-air Sunday trading then abundantly carried on in the East End of London. There were exceptions as to hours, certain transactions being permitted up to 9 a.m. and some after 1 p.m., whereby church-going was to be promoted without the positing of any intelligible interpretation of the Fourth Commandment. In the traditional British fashion, a meeting of public protest was arranged for a Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park; and this the misguided authorities forbade, an inspector of police politely stopping the proceedings. The crowd, dispersing, chaffed the worldlings in their carriages for making their servants work on Sunday and disobeying the Government's orders to "go to church"; and some persons of title were alarmed to the point of leaving their carriages and walking. Naturally, another meeting was called for the next Sunday; this in turn was prohibited by handbill; and Bradlaugh, holding that the Commissioner of Police was acting *ultra vires*, went to look on. This time there was more disturbance, horses were frightened, the mounted police charged the crowd, many were hurt, and seventy were arrested. Bradlaugh, then a very powerful youth, had to threaten to turn the truncheons of some of the police against themselves in order to stop some bludgeoning.

Lord Robert Grosvenor, who was in charge of the provocative Bill, now avowed in the House that, though his object was to increase the holiday time of the "overtaxed thousands of the metropolis," he realized that "this was one of those measures which are peculiarly liable to misrepresentation and ridicule," and accordingly withdrew it. A Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the disturbances; and Bradlaugh, one of eighty-six witnesses for the complainants, against ninety-three for the police, gave lengthy evidence for which he was publicly thanked by the Commissioner and cheered by the audience in the court-room. It was a thoroughly English episode, but a mere preliminary brush for the crusader.

In 1858 Edward Truelove was arrested for publishing a pamphlet by Bradlaugh's young friend W. E. Adams, *Is Tyrannicide Justifiable?* àpropos of the attempt of Orsini on the life of the French Emperor. The Emperor, with his long roll of slain victims, was held by many English folk to be outside the ordinary ethic in these matters; and Bradlaugh became honorary secretary for the defence (the fund for which was contributed to by Mill, F. W. Newman, W. J. Fox, M.P., Joseph Cowen, Harriet Martineau, P. A. Taylor, and many other Liberals), besides helping in the defence of Simon Bernard, who was arrested at the request of the French Government for alleged complicity in the attempt of Orsini. Of the latter Bradlaugh spoke with warm admiration. Bernard was found "Not Guilty" by the jury; and the prosecution of Truelove was abandoned by the Government, with the corrupt connivance of his counsel, Edwin James, who afterwards had to disappear from public life and his native land.

Bradlaugh, always speaking in tumultuous political meetings, and chronically debating and lecturing on such

provocative issues as the character of the God of the Old Testament, came frequently in danger of routine law on the one hand and of private violence on the other. In 1859 a proposed lecture by him on Louis Napoleon was stopped by the police, who garrisoned the hall; and the proprietor, indemnified by the Government, paid damages for breach of contract. In 1860, at Wigan, the resident clergy incited the populace to physical violence against him, and the building in which he lectured was badly damaged; but, "supported by one courageous woman and her husband," he returned to Wigan again and again, till he had won a strong following. In 1861, when he went to Guernsey to defend against a threatened blasphemy prosecution a resident who had distributed some of his pamphlets, the authorities gave drink and leave of absence to soldiers in the garrison, on condition of preventing him from lecturing; and the mob, civil and military, broke in with shouts of "Kill the infidel"; but again only the building was damaged, the soldiers making a very poor fight against the ex-guardsman. At Plymouth, about this period, he was arrested at the beginning of a lecture, imprisoned, and refused bail. The arrest being a blunder, a charge of inciting to breach of the peace and assaulting a constable was trumped up. During his imprisonment the crusader received from the outside many sumptuous meals, including much Devonshire cream; and when the case came to trial, before seven magistrates bent on a conviction, the witnesses for the prosecution all broke down under his cross-examination. When his own witnesses were refused, being then, as unbelievers in hell, incompetent to give testimony under English law, several Nonconformists bravely and honourably came forward to testify, and he was perforce acquitted.

Having been much bullied by some of the magistrates, he announced to them that he would deliver the inter-

rupted lecture "to an audience assembled in the borough," and that he would sue at law the Superintendent of Police who had arrested him. Both things he did. Placards were issued announcing that on Sunday he would deliver his lecture "near the Devonport Park Gates"; and a great police force was in waiting to arrest him. But he passed the crowd at the gates, went by a by-lane to the river-side, stepped into a small boat, and was rowed to a large one moored on the Devonport side of the River Tamar. This water was under the jurisdiction of Saltash, several miles distant; and the authorities had to stand helpless while a very freethinking discourse was delivered to a large audience standing on an open wharf, while the lecturer stood about nine feet outside the borough. The action against the Superintendent was then duly brought, and the case was tried at Exeter Assizes, the officer being of course supported by the borough authorities. Bradlaugh was unfortunately persuaded to brief counsel, and Sir Robert Collier, the "leader," thought fit to open by deploring his client's opinions. In spite of this, after a long trial, he won his case; whereupon the jury, composed of Devonshire landowners, gave him a farthing damages, and the presiding judge refused to certify for costs. Then the insuppressible litigant took the case to the Court *in banco*, and argued it for two days before the Lord Chief Justice and a full bench. He obtained no relief, and incurred altogether costs that for him were heavy; but the costs of the Devonport authorities were so enormous that never again did they interfere with him or any other lecturer; and Bradlaugh was sure of large audiences in the largest halls in the town as long as he lived.

These episodes may be regarded as illustrating his preparation for his destined task of fighting much more important battles on the side of public freedom, and,

finally, one of stupendous length that remains historic. But they also prefigured his fate in that every battle meant a new burden of debt, a steady pressure which, when ultimately combined with an enormous and long protracted strain, brought about his death at an age beyond which he might otherwise have lived for many years.

Adventures of a more romantic kind he had abroad. In 1861, at Naples, he received in his room at his hotel, on behalf of Mazzini, a packet of letters, delivered to him without any conversation that could be overheard. Leaving Naples, he went by a steamship flying the flag of the Two Sicilies to Civita Vecchia, where a boatload of Papal gendarmes came on board, whose officer asked for Bradlaugh and informed him that the British Consul wished to see him on shore. Discerning a snare, he refused; and his luggage was then called for. His passport was treated with contempt, and the gendarmes set about seizing his portmanteau, which contained the packet of letters; whereupon he drew his heavy Colt revolver, pointed it at the head of the nearest gendarme, and intimated that he would blow out the brains of any who touched his luggage. In another moment he would probably have been attacked from behind; but an opportune American, who had been watching the scene, leapt to his aid, standing back to back and, with a vigorously brandished chair for his weapon, undertook to defend the rear. The gendarmerie hesitated and were lost, deciding to go on shore for further instructions; at which stage Bradlaugh was able, with some trouble, to persuade the captain to steam away. He reached his destination without further interference. Upon one occasion, he once mentioned, he was engaged in an attempt to secure the election of a Liberal Pope! But as to that he did not vouchsafe details.

His latest Continental adventure of importance was in

1873, when the celebrated Republican Conference at Birmingham, in a meeting of 4,500 persons, passed a resolution of sympathy with the Spanish Republican Government (which the British Government had refused to recognize), and entrusted Bradlaugh with the carrying of the message to Castelar, the Spanish President of the moment. He went very swiftly, as was his wont. At Irun, on the Spanish frontier, he found the line cut, and further progress possible only by a *calèche*, through country said to be dominated by the brigands under the curé of Santa Cruz. Some Carlists appeared at times, but did not catch the *calèche;* and some ruffians who sought to board it, but were unable to do so, were described by the driver as only thieves. Thus San Sebastian was reached; whence the advance was continued by an extremely precarious diligence through Tolosa, Allegria, Beasain, and Mondragon, towards Vittoria. On the way he saw Carlist handiwork in the shape of a successful attempt, by means of a cut line and a damaged tunnel, to wreck a passenger train coming from San Sebastian. Just then subscriptions for the Carlist cause were being advertised for in the *Times*.

The only serious stoppage from Carlists meant but a long delay and some looting and tariffing of alleged contraband, at some distance from Vittoria. Between Burgos and Madrid the train narrowly escaped running into a Carlist barricade which would have destroyed it with its passengers. At Madrid he was much fêted, and had several interviews with Castelar—one in form at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, three at the President's private residence, and one at his hotel. It was presumably at one of those interviews that, informed of the trouble given by a traitorous general in the north, Bradlaugh offered to ride with fifty dragoons and shoot the general in question. That kind of thing was not in

Castelar's line; and after Bradlaugh's death he published a false statement to the effect that he had not received him at the Ministry, but invited him to call at an early hour in the morning at his private residence. Bradlaugh got home by Santander and Bordeaux, with many difficulties, to learn from the *Weekly Dispatch* that his expenses had been "entirely defrayed by the Carlist Committee in London." The inefficiency of Castelar must have been clear to him; but he always spoke of him kindly, though his remark that the Spanish situation needed "a Cromwell with the purity of a Washington" was probably the source of the rankling resentment which, after Bradlaugh's death, relieved itself in a despicable outburst of aspersion.

After his Spanish trip Bradlaugh was substantially disillusioned as to the prospects of Continental republicanism. In Spain he had seen Carlist prisoners drafted to fight in Cuba, a very low level of discipline in the republican army, and fatal irresolution in the republican leaders. In his autobiographical sketch he even avowed much lack of confidence as to the future of republican France. Gambetta he had seen much of, and esteemed as he deserved; though he entirely disapproved of all the anti-clerical reprisals which Gambetta and his friends excusably thought necessary. But, he wrote, "the years 1870 to 1873 have dispelled some of my illusions, held firmly during the fifteen years which preceded. I had believed in such men as Louis Blanc, Ledru Rollin, Victor Hugo, as possible statesmen for France. I was mistaken. They were writers, talkers, and poets; good men to ride on the stream, or to drown in honest protest, but lacking force to swim against, or turn back, the tide by the might of their will. I had believed too in a Republican France, which is yet only in the womb of time, to be born after many pangs and

sore travailing." But to the last he had many French friendships, among his intimates being such diverse types as Goblet, President of the Chambre in the eighties; Prince Jérome, of whom he had frequently to disapprove, but whom he advised about his will as about his politics; and Yves Guyot, the veteran of our own day. And no disillusionment about theoretic politics could slacken his determination in the unexpected struggles which lay before him in the course of events at home.

In the way of physical conflict, perhaps his most memorable experience was in connection with the political storm aroused by Gladstone's campaign on the "Bulgarian atrocities" in 1878. That was much resented by the Russophobe and pro-Turkish Toryism of the day; and when Bradlaugh, always an anti-Disraelian, organized open-air meetings in support of Gladstone and against the Conservative Government, London Conservatism organized a counter-attack, in which the physical use of loaded bludgeons played a prominent part. At one Hyde Park meeting at which he spoke with his customary power, not sparing Disraeli, a vigorous rush was made in which he was thrown down; and in the *melée* blows from the loaded bludgeons rained on the arm which he raised to guard his head. Getting at last to his feet, he snatched from a friend a short baton, innocent of metal, with which he struck five blows, which sent five men to St. George's Hospital. The Berserker in him was roused, as was to happen once again. In both cases severe erysipelas was the physiological outcome.

VI

NEO-MALTHUSIANISM

It was customary in those days to dub every man a "demagogue" who appealed politically to the masses; and when he was also a freethought lecturer it was usual to associate with the label the statement that the demagogue had earned a large income with his tongue. If Bradlaugh was a demagogue, he did not live up to that ideal. In his early lecturing days, after he had left the army, his life was one of chronic hardship; and even notoriety meant for him costly legal battles which kept him always in debt. His sole income was from his journalism, his lectures, and his pamphlets; and he gave literally hundreds of lectures of which the proceeds went to public causes, he paying his own expenses. Always in debt through his legal struggles, he could give in no other way; but in that fashion he aided the causes of Polish and Italian freedom and of franchise reform, the funds for the relief of Lancashire distress in the cotton famine, the Sheffield distress from the inundation of 1864, and many minor efforts to finance poverty. On the other hand, he deliberately declared himself, early in life, a believer in the Malthusian doctrine as to population, and the Neo-Malthusian doctrine as to the limitation of families. The twofold doctrine, first systematically propounded privately by Robert Owen and Francis Place, had been printed for working-class freethinkers by Richard Carlile; and Bradlaugh, holding it to be true and vital, faced unpopularity on the double count of free-

thinking and Malthusianism. Common sense may reveal even to orthodox men to-day that it was not a concern for lucre that could move any man in the last age to set up such a combination of anathematized propagandas. John Mill in his early youth narrowly escaped a police prosecution for distributing Neo-Malthusian literature. Bradlaugh, who always refused to discuss on the platform matters not properly to be there handled, found himself, at a time when he could ill afford any supererogatory odium, committed to the defence of the sale of a long-published treatise dealing with the physiological side of family limitation. This was the *Fruits of Philosophy: an Essay on the Population Question*, by Dr. Edward Knowlton, an American physician. It had been published freely in England for forty years when, in 1877, the authorities decided to prosecute those who sold it. The first man indicted, at Bristol, appears to have been one of those who sell Neo-Malthusian books along with productions conveying nothing save pruriency: but the then publisher, an associate and friend of Bradlaugh's, at that point stood forward, and was in turn arrested. On reflection he decided that the pamphlet was indefensible, and pleaded "guilty" to the indictment. This at once brought Bradlaugh into action. He did not like the flowery style of the book, which was not in any adequate sense a work of "philosophy"; nor was its physiology up-to-date; but to let it go undefended as indecent was to let a slur be cast on the memories of his old friends James Watson and Austin Holyoake, the former publishers, and this he would not do. Accordingly he took upon himself the legal responsibility of publication; and Mrs. Annie Besant, who three years before had become his colleague and was now his business partner in the Freethought Publishing Company, insisted, much to his embarrass-

ment, on sharing his risks. He was of course taunted, by people who had never dared to face any kind of risk, with "sheltering himself behind a woman." She certainly did three men's work in getting up the scientific side of the case; but the calumny which in due course she incurred was for him the sorest part of the joint burden. At the same time, the breach between him and his old friend, the last publisher, spread to some extent in the Secularist body, bringing a new trouble into a life already so full of struggle. But the battle had to be fought; and while Mrs. Besant was absorbed in her part, his two young daughters came to his aid by taking up the detail work of his journal, the *National Reformer*.

The police prosecution was straightforwardly challenged, the partners announcing their intention to sell in person the condemned work, which they did, to many buyers. In due course they were arrested; their premises were vainly searched in the sage hope of finding really improper literature; and they were charged before the municipal Court at the Guildhall. Counsel offered to drop the prosecution against Mrs. Besant, but she inflexibly refused to be left out. Managing matters with his usual technical skill, Bradlaugh got the Court of Queen's Bench—thanks mainly, perhaps, to the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Alexander Cockburn—to transfer the trial from the Central Criminal Court, to be heard before a judge and a special jury. Curiously enough, the name of the prosecuting person or authority was never disclosed, and could not be formally elicited; but the ill-famed Society for the Suppression of Vice openly took a hand in the campaign by prosecuting Edward Truelove, who sold in his shop Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology*. In his case the result was conviction and imprisonment. At the same period the police confiscated

copies of *The Freethinker's Text-Book* and Bradlaugh's pamphlet on *Jesus, Shelley, and Malthus;* and literature sent out by the F. P. Company was opened in the Post Office. The general battle for a free press, it seemed, was to be fought over again.

Some interesting episodes occurred when the indicted partners sought to obtain witnesses of standing in regard to points to be argued in the defence. Professor Fawcett, like most economists, had endorsed the law of population as propounded by Malthus; but he vehemently refused to be subpœnaed in a friendly way. Darwin, who knew the main truth well enough, having founded his whole theory upon it, differed as to the Neo-Malthusian remedy, holding the curiously pessimistic position that the struggle for existence should not be so mitigated, its continuance being in his view necessary to progress. He courteously and quite truly pleaded, however, that his weak health would make the strain of appearance in Court a matter of great suffering to him, if he were able to come, which was unlikely; and he of course was not pressed. On the other hand, Mr. H. G. Bohn, the aged publisher, who in the past had been reputed zealous for "Christian Evidences," volunteered as a witness, and was most valuable, testifying as he did to the long and unchallenged currency of standard physiological works, such as the *Animal Physiology* of W. B. Carpenter, in which was given the physiological information that was now indicted as "obscene" in the Knowlton pamphlet. Dr. Alice Vickery and Dr. Charles Drysdale, who with Bradlaugh had re-founded the Malthusian League, fearlessly bore their effective testimony as physicians alike to the moral and the medical importance of the Neo-Malthusian doctrine.

For four days the trial lasted, the two defendants arraying part of the mass of evidence and argument

which to this day is evaded, going unrebutted, save by scurrility and bluster, by the people who will rather face immeasurable vice and misery than encourage early marriage with deliberate limitation of families. The Solicitor-General, Sir Hardinge Giffard, in opening had avowed that "the book, I think it may be said, is carefully guarded from any vulgarity of expression: the whole tone of it is, as I say, under the guise of philosophy and medical science"; yet saw fit to say in his speech of reply that "this is a dirty, filthy book," giving reasons worthy of the proposition. His own language was at points such that it had to be expunged or paraphrased in the reports. He incoherently avowed, however, that the prosecution was "most mischievous in its character and probably in its result," pleading that the authorities felt themselves compelled to take action in order to avoid the greater mischief of admitting that the book should be freely sold. The Lord Chief Justice, in his summing-up, emphatically agreed on the first head, declaring that "a more ill-advised and more injudicious proceeding in the way of a prosecution was probably never brought into a court of justice," and passing scathing comments on the "authorities" who had never divulged their status. The summing-up, treating the indicted book as a medical work, was held by the press to be substantially in favour of the defendants. Yet after an absence of an hour and a-half the jury, who had become hopelessly confused among themselves as to what they could agree upon, returned through the foreman the egregious verdict: "We are unanimously of opinion that the book in question is calculated to deprave public morals, but at the same time we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motives in publishing it." This was in effect a verdict of Guilty. Afterwards it came out that six of the jury had not intended to assent

to a verdict of guilty. Among the other six were some who, in discussion, avowed religious as distinct from moral motives.

On going to receive sentence, with Mrs. Besant, Bradlaugh was ready as usual with the apparatus of appeal, submitting three motions—one to quash the indictment, one for arrest of judgment, and one for a new trial. The Solicitor-General skilfully argued that since the verdict the defendants had continued to sell the book, and that Mrs. Besant had publicly claimed that the Lord Chief Justice's summing-up was in their favour. Cockburn had already refused to grant any motion or stay of execution, and now, irritated, he passed a sentence of six months' imprisonment and fines of £200 each. But, just as the partners were being taken into custody, the shamed judge recalled them, and offered "on consideration" to stay execution on their pledge not to sell the book until the Court of Appeal had decided. This was readily agreed to; and the defendants were liberated on their own recognizances of £100 each.

The next step was quaint. In the Court of Appeal (February, 1878) Lord Justice Bramwell, in a lengthy and searching pronouncement, showed that, as had been argued by Bradlaugh, the original indictment had been "bad" in that it had vacuously set forth that the defendants had published "an obscene libel, *to wit*, *The Fruits of Philosophy*," giving no details. The Solicitor-General (afterwards Lord Chancellor) had officially prosecuted "an obscene libel—to wit, this libel." Since the "to wit" merely identified the libel and did not describe it, it was "wholly defective," and judgment must be given for the parties indicted. The whole prosecution was thus quashed, once for all. Mrs. Besant soon produced a more scientific and cogent pamphlet entitled *The Law of Population*, which no

"authorities" ever ventured to prosecute. The City authorities, who had lurked behind the other which they subsidized, had had enough.

Two memorable facts are to be noted concerning the famous trial of 1877. One is that Mrs. Besant, who by her action in the matter made it possible for the law courts to deprive her, with gross judicial insult, of the custody of her little girl on the suit of her husband, the Rev. Frank Besant, afterwards, on her conversion to "theosophy," renounced her Neo-Malthusian teaching. The other is that the Knowlton Trial was the means of making known the possibility and expediency of family limitation to the British population at large; and that from the next year or two onwards there proceeded that fall in the birth-rate which has in the last few years come under the investigation of the National Birth-Rate Commission. Thus to Bradlaugh, who never wavered in either his economic or his philosophic creed, goes the credit of having set up in his own country, on a decisive scale, one of the most momentous changes in social conditions that have ever taken place in human history. Its full operation has yet to be realized; but there is no question, on either side of the debate, as to its gravity.

The claim here made for him is that family limitation has already meant an immense restriction of human misery and a great increase of innocent happiness, with an effect on total national strength of which the World War gives the proof. The charge still made is that the doctrine promotes vice, sin, and degeneration. Those who make the charge have been abundantly informed that vice has in the past been enormously promoted by the abstention from marriage of young men who fear to face the burdens of a rapidly growing family. This evidence they ignore. They have been abundantly informed of the appalling destruction of infant life

resulting from poverty; and they in effect argue that it is better to have infanticide, a holocaust of infant deaths, and an infinity of prostitution with misery and degradation unspeakable, than to practise any such restraint on procreation as is normal among the peasantry of France. Bradlaugh early made up his mind on the problem. In a youthful pamphlet on *Jesus, Shelley, and Malthus*, he summed up the three tempers mainly revealed in social history—that of religious submission, that of humanitarian revolt, and that of science; and his appeal to the people was to cultivate the last. In a later pamphlet, on *Poverty and its Effect on the Political Condition of the People* (1863), he took up the irrefragable position that

> Unless the necessity of the preventative or positive checks to population be perceived; unless it be clearly seen that they must operate in one form if not in another, and that, though individuals may escape them, the race cannot, *human society is a hopeless and insoluble riddle.*

For his teaching he was vilified alike by those who cannot and those who will not see the truth; by the types who privately batten on the prurient and publicly protest against indelicate science; by the middle and upper class people who *want* cheap labour and abject life; and by the pietists whose intelligence, unequal to the perception of any natural law, is sworn to the task of vindicating all evil in the name of the goodness of God. Some Liberals have not scrupled to maintain that Neo-Malthusianism is Tory doctrine, because the original static doctrine of Malthus found Tory welcome. Neo-Malthusianism is the ejection of the Tory *non-possumus* from political science.

The summing-up of the debate is that in Christian times, until Malthus wrote, the general mind had had no glimpse of the problem of natural law in regard to

population; and that, just as in regard to every new phase of the dissolution of orthodox religion, it reacted largely by way of anger and vituperation. When Bradlaugh's action brought to universal notice the problem which Malthus had introduced to the more studious, the fury was proportionate. The average philoprogenitive man hates to hear of a law that convicts him of working his own bane in the legal gratification of his instincts; and the average optimist reformer, beating the surface of things, is exasperated by the warning that social evil lies deeper than the Statute Book. In those circumstances the evasive "authorities" had the sympathy of multitudes in the iniquity which prosecutes and penalizes the serious promulgation of scientific truth while assenting without a murmur to the circulation of all the purposive indecencies in English literature, whether contained in the Canterbury Tales, the Elizabethan or the Restoration drama, Sterne, Fielding, or Swinburne. "Respectable" England, in so far as it reads real literature at all, cherishes these on its sanctum shelves, not solely for their literary genius, but largely for their improprieties; and, in so far as it reads the Bible, is more familiar with similar elements in the Pentateuch than with anything else. Into this world of furtive hypocrisy Bradlaugh brought the breath of a better life. The bigots and the hypocrites are still vociferous against his social science. But he wrought the beginning of the end of their dominion.

VII

PARLIAMENTARY STRUGGLE

When, after more than five years of Conservative government, the General Election of 1880 came in sight, Northampton Liberalism was still divided over Bradlaugh. It was tolerably certain that his local organization, admirably managed by Councillor (afterwards Mayor) Adams, had latterly made his success certain. The men who had fought him during twelve years were loth to come to terms with him; and they strove hard, but vainly, to find an acceptable Liberal candidate or candidates who would antagonize him. The last appealed to was Henry Labouchere, the famous journalist, proprietor of *Truth*. By his own humorous account, he went to Northampton with a Whig speech in one pocket and a Radical speech in the other. Whatever was the outfit, he promptly realized the situation, and informed the official Liberal organizers that he would stand only as co-candidate with Bradlaugh. Making a virtue of necessity, they accepted the alliance, Bradlaugh good-humouredly burying his considerable grounds for grudge. Mr. (afterwards Sir) Thomas Wright, of Leicester, who had previously stood independently, not combining with Bradlaugh, but deprecating further Liberal opposition, now generously withdrew, giving his support to both of the chosen candidates. In due course, Northampton played its part in the great Liberal victory, returning Labouchere and Bradlaugh in place of the former Tory members. Nearly all of Bradlaugh's own supporters, on

his earnest appeal, loyally "split" for Labouchere; but there were always some orthodox hundreds in the other wing who "plumped" in general elections, leaving Bradlaugh the "junior" member. Hence the figures in 1880 were: Labouchere (L), 4,518; Bradlaugh (R), 3,827; Phipps (C), 3,152; Merewether (C), 2,826. Considering that nearly all of the Anglican and some of the Nonconformist pulpits were in full blast against the "infidel," the result was creditable. But the political pressure had been strong. Mr. Samuel Morley, a prominent Dissenter and part proprietor of the *Daily News*, urged that all Liberals should sink other considerations in favour of turning out the Tories. The story that Mr. Spurgeon sent the message: "If the Devil himself were a Liberal candidate I should vote for him," was "a thing devised by the enemy"—the Tory enemy, that is.

When the figures were proclaimed, a roar of anger passed over orthodox England; and poor Mr. Samuel Morley, fiercely denounced for his action, made an abject recantation. Spurgeon, who was of another texture, indignantly repudiated the antinomian doctrine ascribed to him, but manfully declared that Bradlaugh's title to sit in Parliament had nothing to do with orthodoxy. The majority of the House of Commons, including a number of Liberals, took another view, to their own ultimate discomfiture.

Parliamentary oath-taking in England began under Elizabeth, and has ever since been maintained; no number of perjuries in the period of dynastic and civil strifes and no amount of indecorum in the chronic "scramble for Testaments" having availed to discredit the practice. France after 1870 did without it, as did the German Reichstag; Austria in 1868 decently substituted affirmation; the United States permit of either that or oath-taking; and in Italy the formula is simply:

"I swear." The most medievally elaborate oath subsists in Spain. Since 1829 Catholics in England have been allowed to take the Catholic oath; since 1833 Quakers have been permitted to sit on simple affirmation of loyalty; after 1859 Jews were allowed to swear in the Judaic form; and in 1866 the adjuration of all the religious oaths was reduced to the popular formula: "So help me God." In 1868, when there was as yet no permission of affirmation in courts of law, Bradlaugh, though much troubled on the subject, had been prepared to conform to the established practice, as Mill did when in 1865 he had sworn allegiance "on the true faith of a Christian," as other unbelievers did before and in 1880 in the later form, and as Mr. John Morley was to do in 1883. But Bradlaugh now privately consulted the former Liberal law-officers of the Crown, and, finding them to be (as Sir Henry James avowed they always remained) of his opinion that he was legally entitled (under the Parliamentary Oaths Act, 1866; the Evidence Amendment Act, 1869; and the Further Evidence Amendment Act of 1870, which "explains and amends" the last) to make affirmation of his allegiance, he decided that in honour and decency he was bound to make application for that purpose.

It was this concern for honour and decency that made possible all the subsequent trouble. On May 3, 1880, he gave formal and respectful notice to the Clerk of the House of his claim to be allowed to affirm "as a person for the time being permitted to make a solemn affirmation or declaration instead of taking an oath." The Speaker, Sir Henry Brand, unfortunately for his own official fame, decided upon his appearance to request him to withdraw, and then laid the matter before the House, avowing "grave doubts," and referring the matter to its judgment. The advice of the new law-officers being not

yet available, Lord Frederick Cavendish, on behalf of the Government, moved for a Select Committee; and Sir Stafford Northcote, the leader of the Opposition, supported. To a Select Committee, accordingly, the matter went.

Already partizan zeal had announced, through the mouth of Sir Henry Drummond Wolff—one of the four who constituted the "Fourth Party" of that day—the intention to exploit the Bradlaugh case for party purposes. As Lord Rosebery remarks in his book on Lord Randolph Churchill, who was one of the foremost of the hunting pack, it was splendid "sport" for them as politicians. When the names of the proposed Committee were announced, this tactic began. Mr. Stanley Leighton untruthfully alleged that Bradlaugh had been pressed upon Northampton by the Liberal Whip, prompted by Gladstone; and an Irish Catholic, F. H. O'Donnell, *alias* Macdonald, gave the first of many wildly mendacious Catholic accounts of Bradlaugh's doctrines. A division was taken, most of the Conservative leaders walking out of the House; and 74 voted against the motion for the Committee, 171 supporting it. It was evidently feared that the Committee was in fairness bound to support Bradlaugh's claim. What happened was that eight members supported it and eight opposed, the chairman, Mr. Spencer H. Walpole, giving his casting vote for the Noes. This historian later put his hand to the categorically false assertion that Bradlaugh had "*refused to take an oath*, not because he had any conscientious objection to be sworn, but because an appeal to a God—in whom he had no belief—seemed to him an idle formula which was not binding on his conscience."[1]

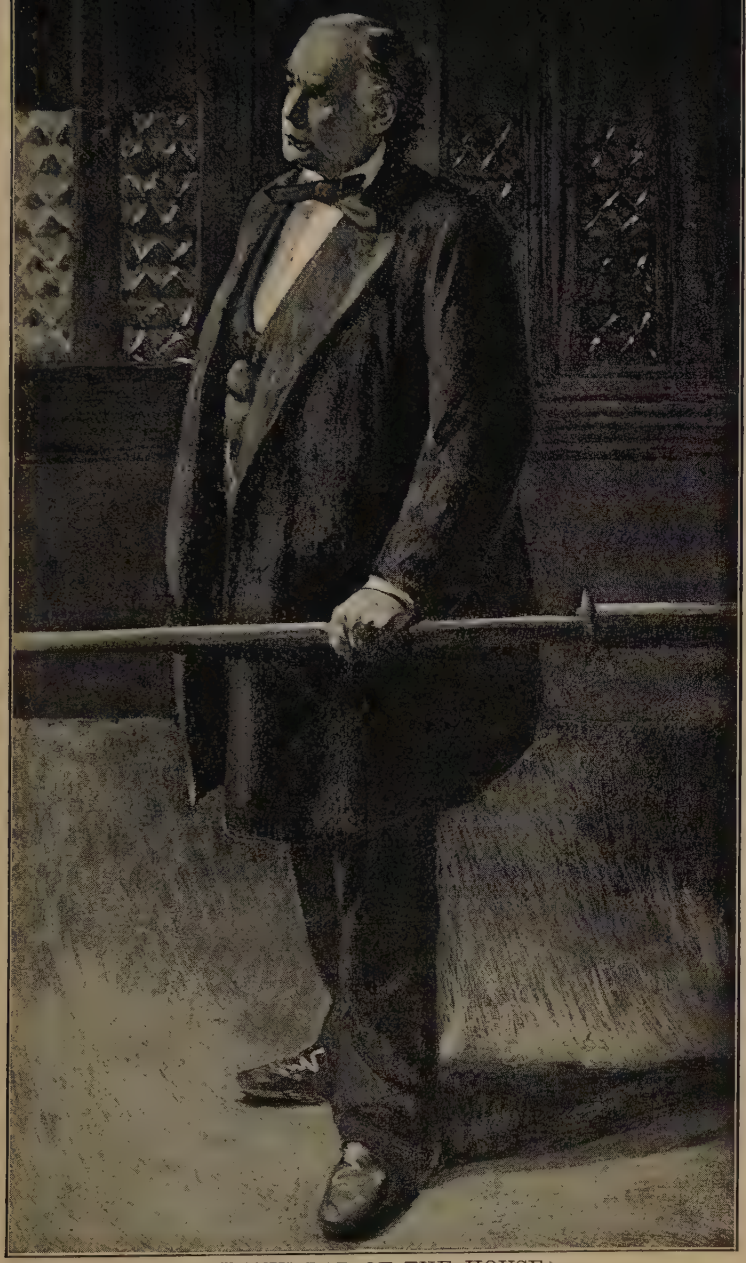
[1] *The Electorate and the Legislature*, by Spencer Walpole, 1881, rep. 1892, p. 75.

The historian must have known that his statement was false. Bradlaugh had never refused to take the oath; and while the law technically—as judges had avowed—implied that the oath was not binding on an atheist's conscience, he had expressly repudiated the expression, repeatedly declaring during 1880 that any promise he made would as such be binding on his conscience, whether or not accompanied by an imprecation.

The false account of his position became for the majority the battle-cry against him. He had sought to avoid an act which might *justly* give offence to religious persons, the taking of the oath when, with high legal confirmation, he believed he need not. Formally refused permission, he announced that he would take the oath in order to obtain his seat. He was then simultaneously told that he ought to have done so at first, that he had *refused*, and that it was an act of hypocrisy to offer now to swear. In the chorus some freethinkers joined, including G. J. Holyoake, for whose business partnership in past days the oath had been taken whenever necessary by his brother Austin, an atheist esteemed by all who knew him. G. J. Holyoake had also once avowed himself ready to take the oath "if it were regarded as a civil act," which was exactly what Bradlaugh now proposed to do. All the same, Holyoake's attack was used to the utmost against the other.

When Bradlaugh on May 21 presented himself to take the oath, the Speaker made the fatal mistake of allowing the intervention of Sir H. D. Wolff with a hostile motion —a course which his successor in 1886 authoritatively declared to be inadmissible. A long sequel of parliamentary scenes, debates, votes, forced elections, renewed scenes, bills, lawsuits, decisions, and appeals was the consequence.

The permitted motion on the Tory side, that the



AT THE BAR OF THE HOUSE
(From a Painting by Walter Sickert)

Facing p. 70

claimant should not be allowed to take the oath, was met by Gladstone with an amendment referring the claim to another Select Committee, which was carried by 289 votes to 214; and this course was taken. Bradlaugh was lengthily examined by the Committee, to whom he fully and expressly showed that he had never refused to take the oath, or said that it would not bind him. The Committee, however, reported that he could not properly take the oath, but recommended that he be allowed to affirm at his legal peril. On his again presenting himself at the House to do this, Labouchere, who fought the battle from beginning to end with no less ability than loyalty, moved that he be allowed to affirm; but this was defeated (June 22) by 275 votes to 230, the majority including many Home Rulers, many Liberals, some Nonconformists, and some Jews. Next day Bradlaugh presented himself, claiming to be sworn, and, being refused, was nevertheless allowed, after debate, to make his First Speech at the Bar.[1] Upon Bradlaugh's retiring, Labouchere moved the rescinding of the resolution of the 22nd; but this was withdrawn at Gladstone's request; and Bradlaugh was recalled to the Table and formally commanded to withdraw from the House. This he respectfully and repeatedly refused to do; and, Gladstone declining to take any action, a sharp discussion ended in Bradlaugh's being "committed to the Clock Tower" on the motion of the much-perturbed Northcote. Before this could be given effect to, there occurred the scene of his repeatedly withdrawing to the Bar when requested by the Sergeant-at-Arms to do so, and immediately returning to the Table. Northcote, helplessly admitting that nobody could condemn Bradlaugh for his

[1] Reprinted, with the others, in *Speeches by Charles Bradlaugh*, 1890; second and enlarged ed., with annotations, 1895.

course, at length moved that he be taken into custody by the Sergeant; Gladstone refusing to interfere. It was after Parnell had made a creditable speech, in which he declared his dissent from the majority of the Irish Home Rulers on the question, that the motion was carried, and Bradlaugh locked up in the historic room on the second story of the Clock Tower.

There, however, he was allowed to receive a constant stream of friendly visitors, among whom were Parnell and some other Irish Nationalists. Outside, his friends had gone instantly to work; petitions flew broadcast; and the general indignation was so pronounced that next day Northcote hurriedly moved for Bradlaugh's unconditional release, which was as hurriedly agreed to. The moving force, it was said, was Beaconsfield, who, Bradlaugh heard, vehemently condemned the entire proceedings, and called his followers fools for their pains.

The House of Commons was indeed in a ludicrous plight. It had in effect decided in several different ways that its own members were not to be believed on an important matter unless they added, "So help me God," and thus excluded the non-Quaker who, like the Quaker Bright, claimed to speak the truth under all serious circumstances. Having taken him into custody, it immediately released him, leaving everything to resume *da capo*. Labouchere, to help it out of its mess, now introduced an Affirmation Bill; but Gladstone proposed (July 1), as a standing order, the compromise of letting the atheist sit pending the *legal* settlement of his claim to sit, upon which the House had already pronounced. By assenting, the House avowed that the law courts might overrule its action. Gladstone's proposal was met by fresh Tory obstruction. He had honourably defended Bradlaugh from the charge of obtruding his opinions on the House. In point of fact, both Committees of Inquiry

had done their best to get him to avow his opinions against his will, thus admitting that he had never obtruded them. On July 2, accordingly, he made affirmation, and took his seat, which he was to hold thus tentatively for nine months.

In that period, by common consent, he did much excellent public work, being a model member in every respect. He knew the Rules of the House as they are known only to the half-dozen men who at any moment are in that respect qualified for the post of Speaker. A large part of his work consisted in resisting the policy of Coercion then followed by the Liberal Government in Ireland. But that was not to avail to win for him much Irish support. Already, on the day before his admission, Parnell, who had undergone heavy pressure from his priest-led adherents, who were supervised by Manning, had declared that "he regarded the religious tenets of Mr. Bradlaugh and his doctrines with reference to over-population as abominable," and that "it was personally an odious task for him to take the course he should on this occasion"—this after he had gone to shake hands with Bradlaugh after his arrest. At this price, he voted for Gladstone's resolution.

It will probably be agreed that John Bright and Henry Richard were considerably more religious men than Parnell; and they did not think it necessary to abominate the opinions they did not share. Bright fought the case on its political merits at every stage with the fighting courage which belonged to him in a supreme degree; and at this juncture he threw out one of the pronouncements which specially exasperated the Conservative champions of the faith, observing that "no man who watched what went on, on the first day of the present Parliament, when hon. members were squeezing round the table and scrambling for the New

Testaments amid laughter—('No, no,' and ministerial cheers)—no man could have watched that scene and believed that the act had any of the solemnity of a religious act about it."

There was no slackening in the furious storm outside. As Lord Henry Lennox had avowed, it was the Conservative tactic against the Liberals "to put that damned Bradlaugh on them." Sir J. Eardley Wilmot even introduced a bill to exclude atheists. Petitions in support were largely signed, sometimes wholesale by children in Sunday schools. Personal libels abounded in those years more than ever; the watch story went the rounds anew; and Mrs. Besant and the Misses Bradlaugh, who taught science classes in connection with the South Kensington system of examinations, were insulted by cowards inside the House and outside. Writs for libel about the watch story elicited prompt and abject apologies: the insults served to harden the fighting temper of the freethinkers. Mr. Grantham, Q.C., M.P., afterwards a judge, and before his death openly impeached in the House of Commons for his flagrant political partisanship on the bench, made the allegation that Bradlaugh gained his living "by the circulation of obscene literature"; and a Conservative member named St. Aubyn pictured atheists as "holding indecent orgies over the bodies of the dead"—this in a debate (in which Bradlaugh forebore to speak) over the admission of Nonconformist corpses to the Church graveyards. Cardinal Manning, who in his work on *The Present Crisis of the Holy See* had declared that England was "the most anti-Catholic and therefore the most anti-Christian power of the world," now declaimed in the *Nineteenth Century* to the effect that the native religiosity of the English people would not endure Agnostics in Parliament, much less those whose theological position

he proceeded deliriously to describe. Then as afterwards Bradlaugh was refused space for a reply in the review. But it should be always remembered that in June, 1880, the "Home Government Association" of Glasgow passed a resolution that "this meeting of Irish Roman Catholics" expressed its "astonishment and indignation at the cowardly acquiescence, and in a few instances active support, on the part of a large majority of the Irish Home Rule members" in the parliamentary action against him. Some Protestant clergymen spoke out no less manfully; but it was plain that a long battle lay ahead.

Immediately upon giving his first vote, just after taking his seat, Bradlaugh was served with a previously prepared writ to recover a penalty of £500 for illegal voting. The suitor, one Clarke, was the tool of Mr. Newdegate, M.P., an old opponent of the admission of Jews to Parliament and a bitter anti-Catholic, now combining with Jews and Catholics to deny civil rights to the atheist. Other writs followed; but the work was left to Newdegate's employee. At length, on March 7, 1881, the action was heard in the Court of Queen's Bench before Mr. Justice Mathew, a newly appointed Roman Catholic, only that morning sworn-in. On the 11th judgment was given for the plaintiff, and Bradlaugh applied for a stay of execution as to costs, with a view to appeal. In the House Mr. Gorst and Lord Randolph Churchill suggested that the aim was delay, and Bradlaugh on March 23 moved the Court of Appeal to expedite the hearing, which took place on the 30th, before Lords Justices Bramwell, Baggallay, and Lush. They rejected his contention that Clarke was not entitled to sue, and supported the judgment of the lower Court, Lord Justice Lush, however, assuring the appellant that he had argued his case "with great propriety as well as great force."

Bradlaugh's seat was now by law vacant, and he at once stood for re-election. It was naturally a desperate contest, and, though the Conservative candidate was feeble, "Corbett and Christianity" served well enough as an alliterative rallying cry, the more solid work being done by an unmatchedly vile pamphlet of libels, compiled by one Varley. "Some of my foes," wrote Bradlaugh, "have been more foul than even I had thought possible." But he had by this time a perceptible measure of Press support, even the *Times* saying a word in his favour; and he was re-elected (April 9, 1881) by 3,437 votes against 3,305, having thus lost 390 since the general election. On April 26 he again presented himself at the table of the House. Northcote intimated that he felt bound to act as before, and the committed Speaker had to let him. The Liberal amendment was ably moved by Mr. Davey, and Bright seconded with one of the great speeches in which he combined the finest hitting power with a nobility of tone and view which, contrasted with the sheer currishness of the attack, always recalled the image of the lion at bay. Replying to one of the insults thrown out at Bradlaugh while he spoke, he made the calm rejoinder:—

> I can feel the greatest charity for a member of this House who in my opinion holds views on religious matters which appear to me so extraordinary and so unfortunate.....There has been no member of this House who has conducted himself with greater propriety and decorum—(cheers)—and he has brought to our discussions an average—perhaps more than an average—ability; and there is not a single word he has uttered, not a single act he has committed, which in the slightest degree ought to bar him from taking his place in this assembly of gentlemen. (Cheers.)

But the quotation,

Bigotry may swell
The sail he sets for Heaven with blasts from Hell,

was not so well calculated to turn votes as to infuriate tempers.

With difficulty had the Speaker obtained hearing for Bradlaugh's claim to be heard at the bar; but that mysterious privilege was not withheld, and Bradlaugh made his Second Speech at the Bar, which with the others should be read by those who wish to figure the scene and his personality. Gladstone, in a quiet speech, suggested that the House was itself on its trial, and, outgoing Bright, avowed of Bradlaugh that "his conduct while he was on these benches was the conduct of a man of great ability, integrity, and honour." And he quoted a letter from Sir George Grey expressing "the fullest conviction that the opposition to the taking of the oath by Mr. Bradlaugh ought not to be permitted by the Chair"—a view which the Speaker was thought by that time partly to share.

But the fight had to go on. Northcote's motion was carried by 208 votes to 175, the *âmes damnées* on the Liberal and Irish benches holding their course; and then came the now inevitable scenes. Bradlaugh went to the table as before, protesting and refusing to withdraw; the helpless Speaker asked for instructions; and the helpless Northcote sparred feebly with Gladstone, who refused to interfere. On the Speaker explaining that the order to withdraw extended only to the bar, Bradlaugh strategically withdrew to that position; and the leaders went on sparring, Northcote feebly and Gladstone indignantly, till Mr. Cowen moved the adjournment of the House, which was eagerly assented to as the one way out—for the moment. Next day, of course, the scene recommenced, Bradlaugh going to the table and retiring to the bar as before. Labouchere, moving the

adjournment of the House, asked for facilities for his Affirmation Bill; Gladstone was elaborately willing, provided the Bill was not to be resisted by the Opposition; and the sorely burdened Northcote, personally willing to let it pass, could not answer for his followers. Bright spoke with his unfailing force; a Mr. Hubbard tearfully invoked the police; Newdegate offered to act personally; Mr. Chaplin, with a courteous compliment to Bradlaugh, explained that they must stand by the Supreme Being whose guidance they invoked at prayers, without however asserting that they were visibly getting it; others contributed equally valuable reflections; and one sage intimated that he would introduce a measure for the partial disfranchisement of Northampton. At length the motion for adjournment was by leave withdrawn, and Bradlaugh consented to withdraw, to await the decision of the Government.

It came soon, in an announcement of an Affirmation Bill, which Churchill proceeded to oppose at every stage, while Bradlaugh issued an Appeal to the People and held a great meeting at Northampton. "This I do pledge myself," he declared at the close, "that if health do keep and life do hold, I will never give way"; and for whole minutes the meeting thundered its pledge in answer. He then rose and asked, "Will you stand by me in this fight?" and when every hand went up in a new hurricane of cheers he ended: "Then, on my honour, if I live, we will win." The pledge and the prophecy were to be fulfilled, to the humiliation of the shamed House of Commons, but at the price of the shortened life of the champion of constitutional liberties.

In the House the Affirmation Bill staggered on a slow course. Northcote pitifully yielded to his bullies; and Mr. Balfour, entering for the first time into the controversy, demurred to legislation for the relief of one

man. On a division the Government won by only six votes. After prolonged obstruction the Government suspended the Bill; and when Bradlaugh presented himself next day to bring matters to a head, Gladstone assented to a motion by Northcote that he should be removed by the Sergeant-at-Arms from the House until he should engage "not to further disturb the proceedings." Bradlaugh decided to hold back until the Irish Land Bill had got through the House. Meantime the battle went on outside. As a rule, newspaper attacks on him were anonymous; but an Anti-Atheistic Committee was formed, with the name of Sir Bartle Frere, of pro-consular memory, on its prospectus. It held a ticket meeting in Exeter Hall, for which, by the avowal of a magistrate member, six prize-fighters were engaged to "stop the mouths of Mr. Bradlaugh's friends with their fists." Still, the promoters, by the avowal of Canon Taylor, were sadly disappointed in the audience. Bradlaugh, on the other hand, held a score of open meetings in the large towns; and one on his behalf arranged by the Constitutional Rights League, held in St. James's Hall and packed to the door, was addressed by speakers including three clergymen, without a dissentient vote being given. Two clergymen in particular—the Rev. Mr. Sharman of Plymouth, Nonconformist, and the Rev. Stewart Headlam of London, Anglican—deserve naming here for their constant fortitude on the side of political justice. Some prominent Liberals thought fit to censure the fighter. To balance, Mr. Goldwin Smith made a vigorous attack on the persecutors, declaring that "the ringleaders are scamps," and that the legal decision given was "to the shame of British civilization and religion."

More concrete fighting proceeded in the law courts, where Bradlaugh was gradually getting in hand the

Newdegate litigation. The Clarke writ had in point of fact been taken out before Bradlaugh had voted, Newdegate being afraid of the bringing of a friendly action. Under cross-examination, Newdegate and his witnesses visibly and grossly prevaricated. The principal had given a bond of "maintenance" to Clarke, who had no means of his own to meet costs. In the argument over the time of issue of the writ Bradlaugh extracted from Newdegate the confession that he had given a bond of indemnity to Clarke; and now the tables were to be turned, Bradlaugh bringing against Newdegate a "criminal" action for "maintenance," and, at the same time, appealing for a new trial on the question of the writ, on the ground that the verdict was against the weight of the evidence. The magistrate who dealt with the criminal summons for "maintenance" had the effrontery to censure Bradlaugh for "unfriendly feeling" towards the man who was zealously trying to ruin him, and dismissed the summons, alleging that the procedure was obsolete. At once Bradlaugh raised a civil action. The end was not reached till 1883. On his appeal against the decision as to the validity of a writ issued on the day of the ground of action, the judges supported the lower court. On the pleading for a new trial as to the actual hour of issue of the writ he won; and Clarke and Newdegate, after vacillation, decided to appeal against that, having good reason to dread it. They in turn won, the decision of the judges (Brett, Cotton, and Holker) eliciting some grave legal comment outside. Bradlaugh had then to pay £500 into court as for the penalty, obtaining respite only as to costs, besides giving securities for large sums on his appeals to the House of Lords; and his enemies were very hopeful of his financial ruin. A *friendly* action brought from Northampton was barred by decision of Justices Manisty and Watkin Williams,

which again elicited hostile legal comment. Yet other actions emerged—one by Bradlaugh against the Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms, which he lost. At this stage he had five actions on hand at one time (the *Freethinker* prosecutions, described later, having intervened to complicate his personal struggle), and his debts were mounting, swallowing up two legacies. But at last the fortune of the war began to change.

In March, 1884, the appeal in the original Clarke case was heard in the House of Lords, and in April their lordships decided for Bradlaugh, with costs, on the finding that Clarke ("maintenance" apart) had no legal title to sue for penalties. A fortnight later Lord Chief Justice Coleridge gave judgment in the maintenance case, deciding not merely that Newdegate's case fell with Clarke's, but that, on the merits, Newdegate's action must be held illegal unless the law on maintenance was to be set aside. After speaking gravely and weightily of his responsibilities on the religious side of the case, his lordship gave a general decision in Bradlaugh's favour as to the mass of costs. Thus was the long battle won on this wing. Newdegate gave notice of appeal, but abandoned it. Seeking to ruin Bradlaugh, he had brought himself into serious financial straits.

But while the litigation had been under way Bradlaugh had suffered the worst stress of the parliamentary battle proper. On July 2, 1881, Gladstone had definitely intimated to him that the Government had no hope of carrying their Oaths Bill in that session after the Irish Land Bill. At once Bradlaugh prepared for fresh hostilities, respectfully notifying the Speaker of his intention, and pointing out that the excluding order of May 10 did not authorize the Sergeant-at-Arms to use force. To Northcote he addressed an open letter in mordant terms, to which Northcote made a feeble

defensive reply. With his litigations in full swing, Bradlaugh at once resumed his platform campaign, speaking at many demonstrations and mass meetings, and everywhere getting enthusiastic support. At length, on August 3, he went to the House, a great host of his followers standing outside. Refused admission to the House by the regular officials, he pressed on, declaring that he was fulfilling his duty to his constituents, and accurately warning them that any one laying hands on him would do so at his peril. The House messengers being unequal to the task, ten powerful constables, aided by four of the messengers, in accordance with plans concerted with Northcote, were set upon him; and in a flash of fury at the ignoble device he resisted with all the strength of a great frame not yet broken down by his toils. The ten gladiators had a terrific task, struggling desperately down the lobby stairs and all the way to the entrance. Newspaper reports give a view of the close of the scene, which was eagerly followed by gleeful groups of Conservative gentlemen:—

> The sight, little of it as was to be seen from the outside, soon became sickening.....An almost death-like pallor had spread over Mr. Bradlaugh's sternly-set features; he was gasping for breath, his body was bent, and he was in a state of exhaustion painful to see. His black frockcoat was much torn, his collar and shirt disarranged, and he himself in a condition of intense mental excitement and bodily prostration.....The Trafalgar Square phrase [of the day before] that this man might be broken but not bent occurred to minds apprehensive at the present appearance of him.....His face was deathly white, and there was about the mouth an expression of determination which those who witnessed it cannot readily forget. Overborne by the desperate struggle, he fainted, but soon recovered when water was brought to him.

One word from him, or from Mrs. Besant, who stood with a large mass at another door, would have sent the host of his friends—thousands of them keen artisans from all parts of the country—into the House to eject its members, or at least the wretched ringleaders, into the Thames if necessary. Many never ceased to regret that he did not give the word. But he knew better. In the moment of supreme outrage and supreme temptation he held to his faith in law and order, forbade all outbreak, and merely proceeded to make a formal show of attempt to re-enter by way of legal ground for a fresh action. In the evening he spoke at the Hall of Science, commanding his friends to avoid all violence; whereafter he went off for treatment of the erysipelas set up in one of his arms (of which several small muscles were ruptured)—the arm that had similarly suffered from the Tory bludgeons in 1878. It was said in the House that several of the ten policemen were even worse damaged, requiring prolonged leave and hospital treatment. Later a working-man's wife from Northampton embarrassed the entire force acutely by congratulating them on the splendid victory of fourteen over one, and condoling with those who had suffered most from "that awful grip," which had nearly dislocated some of their necks. But for Bradlaugh the frightful struggle probably meant the shortening of his life by some years.

In the House, after the usual rambling discussion, an approving resolution was carried. Bradlaugh went on with his law-suits. An application for a summons against the police inspector in respect of the final formal and courteous denial of admittance was refused by the magistrate. The Tory press and platform behaved after their wont, and the contemptibles of all parties swelled the coward censure of the ministerial journals which elected to blame the victim instead of the villains of the

piece. But the better part of Liberalism inevitably rallied to the right; and the Rev. E. D. Girdlestone sent Bradlaugh a noble letter of indignant sympathy. "If the present Cabinet," he wrote, "does not secure your admission to the House in some way or other, I can only wish they may be turned out of office. The name of 'Christian' and the religion of 'Christ,' which I venerate, they make odious. As if Christianity could ever be *less* than common justice. I don't know what more I can do than say, 'Go on!' and 'Go on!'" The then Lord Derby, speaking at the Liverpool Reform Club, avowed his utter disbelief in the value of political oaths, and appealed for a decent solution.

At the opening of the new session of 1882 Bradlaugh went to the table as usual, with the usual opposition from Northcote, who now committed himself to the "no binding effect" argument. Bradlaugh withdrew as before to the bar, where, after the customary futile debate, he made his Third Speech at the Bar, in which he offered to stand aside for a month if the House would in that time discuss an Affirmation Bill. If they demurred to making it a Bradlaugh Relief Bill, he would resign his seat and stand for re-election. The old kind of debate followed, Labouchere fighting with his unwavering staunchness; and Northcote's usual motion was carried by 286 to 228 against the Government's "previous question." Again Bradlaugh came forward, Northcote moved, and Bradlaugh retired below the bar, where he was now left to do as he would! At this stage he had so far won that he could attend every sitting provided he did not pass the bar, and could use the library and the rest of the House at his pleasure!

After he had appealed to his constituents to choose whether or not he would resign, and being answered as was to be expected, thirty indignation meetings in his

support were held throughout the country in a week. Gladstone declaring himself unable to do anything, Labouchere moved for a new writ, on the score that the seat was being made void; Churchill moved an amendment describing Bradlaugh as disqualified; but the Government and Northcote opposed; and on a form of motion left truncated and verbally quite meaningless the House divided, 307 vetoing Labouchere's proposal against eighteen "Ayes." Once more Bradlaugh went to the table, and to the astonishment of the members, who looked languidly for a repetition of the old moves, he rapidly took the oath on a New Testament in the regulation form. The whole thing, signing of the oath form included, was done before the House could collect its faculties. Northcote was speechless; the Speaker, however, gave the usual command, upon which Bradlaugh went to the bar as of old, but announced that he would return, and did so, seating himself on a back bench; then, after further discussion, retiring below the bar and sitting below the gallery, leaving everything "at sea" as before. Next day there was new debate and a new scene; Gladstone blandly declining to do anything, despite furious Tory taunts; Northcote flabbily proposing strong measures; Bradlaugh again sitting within the House and again withdrawing; and all ended in a vote for expulsion and an agreed motion for a new writ for Northampton, the seat being declared vacant.

Again the seat was fought, and again Bradlaugh won. Mr. Samuel Morley abjectly wrote to the Northampton Nonconformists, adjuring them to vote Tory "as an act of allegiance to God," whereupon the Radical Association of Bristol resolved to unseat Mr. Samuel Morley, and sent to Northampton 3,000 copies of an address exhorting the electors to return Bradlaugh. Both sides strained every nerve, and the Tory side every principle

of honour and decency; but once more "Corbett and Christianity" were defeated (March 2, 1882), this time by a majority of only 108, which, however, was enough to make the Christian candidate declare to some unsympathetic voters: "I shan't come back to your dirty town any more"—a promise faithfully kept. In the House the battle was resumed with all its "confused noise." In a debate opened by Northcote, Mr. Marjoribanks, speaking to an amendment on behalf of the Gladstone Government, was freshly and insolently offensive. Labouchere undertook on Bradlaugh's behalf that if it were agreed to introduce fresh legislation he would absent himself until a decision was come to; but in the division twelve Liberals and twenty-six Irish Home Rulers supported Northcote, many others stayed away, and Northcote's motion was carried by 259 votes to 244.

Bradlaugh, setting in motion anew his machinery of agitation, at this stage pointed out very courteously but unanswerably that the Speaker had entangled himself in contradictory decisions as to the "privilege" of moving for an election writ and on various other points. But beside the collective and virulent imbecility of the majority of the House the Speaker was rather a pathetic than an obnoxious figure; and beside the Tory press he was as Hyperion to a satyr. The *Saturday Review* explained to its flock that the average Northampton elector was of the type of the last man who had tried to shoot the Queen, and the *Evening Standard* described Bradlaugh's supporters as collectively bent on picking pockets at their open-air demonstrations. Cardinal Manning, allowed a free hand in the *Nineteenth Century*, awoke in many Rationalists a new temper of detestation towards his Church; and an illegal visit by him to Northampton in prelatic state revived such sentiment even in highly orthodox quarters. After the Cardinal's

third article Bradlaugh produced a pamphlet entitled *A Cardinal's Broken Oath*, in which the prelate was smitten on the mouth in such a fashion that he thereafter held his peace. He had, as Bradlaugh pointed out, violated his own elaborately solemn oath as an Anglican priest to abhor, detest, and abjure the claims of Rome. The circumstance that his chief Catholic henchman in the House, Philip Callan, was chronically drunk, was not lost sight of. Translated into Italian and carefully circulated at Rome and elsewhere, the tract had a distinguished audience. The incomparably greater Cardinal, Newman, wrote to a correspondent in 1883 concerning the Affirmation Bill that in his opinion "nothing would be lost to religion by its passing, and nothing gained by its being rejected."

At this stage even Conservative protests emerged One Conservative wrote a pamphlet in Bradlaugh's favour, and another, avowing that he put self-respect before party, sent an open letter of stinging criticism to Northcote, calling his attention to the numerous latitudinarian priests in the Church, "including the father-in-law of your own son, Canon Farrar," and predicting that Bradlaugh's name would survive when those of the Conservative leaders were forgotten. But Conservative zeal was not to be thus controlled. A new move to ruin Bradlaugh was made by Sir Henry Tyler, who had distinguished himself by insulting Mrs. Besant and the Misses Bradlaugh, and who, as one journal pointed out, sat for "one of the smallest and most corrupt constituencies in England." It being impossible to convict Bradlaugh of "blasphemy" in any passable sense from his own writings or his journal, it was sought to implicate him in a prosecution set up against the *Freethinker*, which was sold at the shop of the Freethought Publishing Company, of which he and Mrs. Besant were

the partners. No case was ever more foully fought, the prosecutors obtaining from the Lord Mayor power to inspect Bradlaugh's bank book. As against him the prosecution ultimately failed; but on a separate prosecution G. W. Foote, editor, William Ramsey, publisher, and Henry Arthur Kemp, shopman, were by Mr. Justice North sentenced in March, 1883, to a year's imprisonment for blasphemy in respect of certain woodcuts in a Christmas number of their journal. The sentence provoked an unprecedented outbreak of indignation from the audience in the court, and immensely widened the acceptance given to the prosecuted journal. The same judge had let off with three months' imprisonment a ruffian who had killed, by a kick on the face, a coffee-stall keeper who refused him a second cup of coffee until he had paid for the first. Bradlaugh did on this occasion what he had never done before, addressing a public letter of reprobation to the judge.

The original action, in which Bradlaugh had been conjoined, came on soon afterwards, he being permitted by Lord Coleridge to have the charge against him tried separately. He was acquitted, despite the pious eloquence of Sir Hardinge Giffard, the jury returning a verdict of "Not Guilty," which elicited loud cheers from the audience, echoed in many journals. When the original case against Foote and Ramsey (already convicted on the second prosecution) came before Lord Coleridge, he treated them very considerately and deprecated persecution, but admitted the incidence of the law of blasphemy. The jury disagreed, and the case was dropped; but the prisoners nonetheless underwent the sentence inflicted by Mr. Justice North. At that time Lord Coleridge's own admired friend, Matthew Arnold, was certainly indictable for the blasphemy of picturing the Holy Trinity as "three Lord Shaftesburys"; but

Christian law has latterly been in these matters a great respecter of persons.

Successful in three decisive actions, Bradlaugh made a fresh push in the parliamentary campaign in the new session of 1883, announcing his intention as usual to the Speaker. At last, however, the Government undertook to introduce an Affirmation Bill; which was perhaps as well, for Bradlaugh was appealed to by the police-inspector to reassure the multitude outside, who were angrily apprehensive of fresh violence against him. The Tory opposition was strenuous. Half a million signatures to petitions against his admission had been obtained by the combined machinery of the Anglican and Catholic Churches, the great majority being those of school children and coerced employees. In the debates the son of Northcote called Bradlaugh's supporters a mob of unwashed ruffians; Wolff accused Lord Chancellor Selborne of using his position to help his party; and Churchill said the same thing of Lord Chief-Justice Coleridge. Gladstone, for his part, made the great speech in which he cited the "noble and majestic lines" of Lucretius, picturing the untroubled life of the Epicurean Gods, a belief in whom, or in any such Deity, would have sufficed the Churchill crew as a title to sit in the House of Commons; as would the Deism of Voltaire, whose war-cry against the persecuting Church was *Écrasez l'Infâme*. "Voltaire would not have had the slightest difficulty in taking your oath; and yet that is the state of the law for which you are working up the country to madness." Churchill, who had declared that a belief in "some divinity or other" was a religious requisite, gave a fresh sample of his quality in a description of Bradlaugh's supporters as "the residuum, the rabble, and the scum of the population." In a retaliatory tractate, Bradlaugh, who held the memory of

the great Marlborough in abhorrence, returned the aspersion with interest. A few years later, when Bradlaugh sat, immovable by any tactics, Churchill, leading the House and conscious of his incapacities, cringed for Bradlaugh's friendly treatment.

The Bill was defeated (May 3) by 292 votes to 289, to the frenzied delight of the Tories and the Irish Home Rulers, one of the latter shouting that "the Irish have beaten Bradlaugh." The "beaten" one simply resumed his campaign, presenting himself next day as usual, and making his Fourth Speech at the Bar, in which he mentioned in passing that Callan had on the previous day used "filthy and blasphemous" language towards another Irish member who proposed to vote for the Bill. Passing to higher things, he ended with a peroration of noble dignity, which elicited loud Liberal cheers. Labouchere, taking the bull by the horns, pointed, without using his name, but in unmistakable terms, to the case of Mr. John Morley, who had actually taken the oath, and against whom the Tories would gladly have proceeded but for the knowledge that there were atheists on their own side. The bold challenge was studiously ignored, and Labouchere's motion of "the previous question" was duly defeated.

Outside, Bradlaugh once more went through the country, addressing over 300,000 people in the course of a few months, and raising a higher tide of indignation than ever. Mrs. Besant had been insultingly refused the use of the Royal Botanic Society's garden for her botanical studies; the Misses Bradlaugh were as insultingly refused membership of the Somerville (Women's) Club; and all three were denied admittance to the Practical Botany class at University College, which had been expressly founded to dispense with religious qualifications. When, on a memorial to the Council signed by

Huxley, Bain, Tylor, and other leading men, an extraordinary general meeting was held to consider the question, the medical graduates came in overwhelming numbers to support the action taken, and only nine voted against. Medicine had rallied loyally to the Church; and Mr. Justice Denman published the falsehood that the ladies had "refused to comply with the rules of the College."

Bradlaugh's next move was to notify a fresh appearance; and, when Northcote's usual motion was carried, to inform the Sergeant-at-Arms that if the latter would say he interpreted the order for exclusion to involve the use of physical force, he would take legal proceedings to test the right of the House to exclude him. This was done, the Treasury defending, with the result that the judges (Coleridge, Stephen, and Mathew) decided (February 9, 1884) against his claim, explaining that "if injustice has been done it is an injustice for which the courts of law afford no remedy." Expecting this judgment, Bradlaugh had arranged through his colleague that no action was to be taken against him until he presented himself at the House on February 11, once more to administer the oath to himself, with Labouchere and Thomas Burt as his introducers. The Speaker took the usual course, followed by the usual debate, which, however, Labouchere now signalized by declaring in good set terms that he regarded the oath (which he had taken) as an utterly unmeaning form, "just the same superstitious incantation as the trash of any Mumbo-Jumbo among African savages." Mixed laughter and outcry greeted a declaration which reduced the "sanctity of the oath" once for all to farce. The Tories did not dare proceed against Labouchere, knowing that if they did he would publish in *Truth* the names of the Tory atheists in the House.

New debate followed on the "motion to exclude," which was now made to apply to "the precincts of the House." Northcote was at that stage exhibited by the caricaturists as playing pantaloon to Churchill's clown; and he fully earned the description. After offering to observe quiescence till his law case was settled, and being met by the carrying of the Northcote motion, Bradlaugh applied for the "Chiltern Hundreds," whereupon Churchill, who had laboured in vain to have him declared incapable in perpetuity of sitting, moved the adjournment of the debate upon Labouchere's motion for a new writ. This was defeated, and Bradlaugh went to a fourth election, which he won with an increased majority—4,032 to 3,664. After the utmost stress of struggle, he had passed the worst. On his resumption of the wrestle with the House, Northcote, amid cries of "Shame," moved his exclusion from the precincts, and this was carried; Churchill exhibiting his utmost virulence, and the demoralized majority its utmost cowardice. "You wear knightly orders," wrote Bradlaugh to Northcote in a contemptuous open letter; "you should be above a knave's spitefulness."

In June, 1884, the Government's law-suit on the validity of his self-administered oath was tried before three judges (Coleridge, Grove, and Huddleston) "sitting at bar," with a jury, to which were put eight questions of circumstantial and legal fact; and the findings and verdict were against him. Stoically fighting on, he moved for a new trial, which came on in December, the judges now sitting *in banc*, which, he had argued, they ought to have done before. Again the judges, who argued the case with him very fully, were against him, deciding in effect that they could not infer any wish on the part of past legislators to regard an atheist as having

any civic rights, whatever they might think of "Lucretian" theists. In vain did Bradlaugh point out the absurdity of the existing system, in which the first forty members sworn in a new Parliament are bound to break the law, since they swear while there is not a "full House" sitting. Incidentally it was laid down that any non-believer in a falsehood-punishing Deity could be enormously penalized, after swearing, for his votes. But nobody pretended that the law was thus to be enforced against anybody but Bradlaugh.

In 1885 an attempt by Mr. Hopwood to carry an Affirmation Bill came to nothing, the Government refusing to tempt another defeat, though the Liberal Conference of 1884 had unanimously declared for Northampton's rights. When, on the defeat of the Gladstone Ministry in July, 1885, the Conservatives took office, Bradlaugh presented himself; the new leader of the House, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, followed the old course; and Parnell and Mr. Healy distinguished themselves by proposing Bradlaugh's preliminary exclusion. A few years only had to pass ere the two Irish exclusionists were at each other's throats in the break-up of their own party. But the situation was now dissolving in Parliament. The new general election was at hand; and in that the Liberal voting at Northampton stood: Labouchere, 4,845; Bradlaugh, 4,315; Tory, 3,890. The game of bigotry was up. A round dozen of the Liberal recreants, including Mr. Samuel Morley, lost their seats, on the declared ground of their action in the Northampton question. Several Tory and Irish "malignants," including Wolff and Earl Percy, met the same fate, and Newdegate withdrew to avoid certain defeat. Even some Tory members had to pledge themselves to support an Affirmation Bill.

But the new Speaker, Mr. Peel, settled the question

out of hand. In the new House he peremptorily and absolutely refused to allow any member, leading or other, to interfere between another member and the oath, declaring that he, as Speaker, had no right to allow such an interference. Thus he stultified once and for all the whole previous action of the House and that of his predecessor in the Chair, and no one could say him nay. The House which had played the bully through five-and-a-half years was with consummate decision reduced to law by its own supreme officer, neither of the two great parties being able to claim the honour of having at last conformed to the plain principles of the constitution. The action of Mr. Speaker Peel, which Bradlaugh witnessed with an amused admiration, gives him a permanent prominence in the long line of the holders of his august office. But it was perhaps only the clear evidence of the general defeat of the bigots in the election that dictated the submission of the humiliated bigots in the House. By their own declaration the oath was "trampled upon." They had witlessly willed it.

In due time (1888) Bradlaugh carried his own Affirmation Bill, other men's attempts having failed. Thus he consummated the great fight, the winning of which made him prematurely old. It will be obvious to any reflecting reader that only his unique combination of courage, fighting power, invincible resolution, and legal skill could have achieved such a result in such circumstances. The first three qualifications would have been insufficient without the fourth; it was by a five-years' war in the law courts that Bradlaugh saved the legal liberties of English constituencies, at the constant risk of his own financial ruin. But not the ablest lawyers in England would have dreamt of fighting such a battle in such a cause; it needed the heroic heart to dream of facing it.

And this it was, when all is said, that held to him the unyielding adherence of the effective "stalwarts" throughout the electorate. It is only the stupidity generated by malice that could have blinded any large number of practical politicians to the folly of braving the ineradicable spirit of justice in the mass of a free nation. If there is one thing to which in all ages Englishmen in general cordially respond, it is courage; and here was the supreme case of courage in the public life of a generation. One man had wrestled with the House of Commons through six years. Month after month and year after year he had fought the whole herded forces of religious malice and Tory brutality, standing in an unending storm of venomous abuse, always in the front of the fight, conducting his own gigantic and incessant law-suits, addressing a perpetual series of great open meetings, breaching at every new crisis the coward-castle of the majority in the House of Commons, fighting them to a standstill again and again, holding his seat through five pitched battles in the teeth of the concentrated efforts of all the banded bigotries of England. Such a figure and such a fight inspirited and thrilled every man in whom fanaticism had not impaired manhood. Had he gone down, the defeat would have cheapened the character of his race; and all over the world its best blood responded to him against his hosts of rabid enemies. To him and to his helpers fell the honours of the fight, the very memory of which is a shame to the factions, religious and political, which opposed him. And the total episode left certain enduring differences in the public life and the culture life of the nation.

Two broad inferences were drawn from the phenomena of the Bradlaugh struggle by many people who had not generalized to the same effect in the past. One was

that religious belief largely works out in political practice as a corrupter of character. The other was that the political party which claimed to be specially that of "English gentlemen" had exhibited collectively, with hardly one eminent exception, the apparent possible maximum of all ungentlemanliness.

Bradlaugh, who keenly scrutinized his enemies and estimated them in the mass philosophically even at the height of his struggle, always said that there had occurred in the matter a contagion of demoralization such as affects a mob, whose members will collectively commit heedless brutalities of which most of them would be singly incapable. Parties in Parliament, he observed, tended to develop the mob spirit (a truth at times exemplified in later years); and men normally gentlemen literally "forgot themselves." As a practical fighter he had, of course, a passing human satisfaction in striking his hardest at men like Manning and Churchill, who used the advantages of place and birth to strike like caitiffs. But he was incapable of class hatred. He had had the corrective experience of base enmity from some men of his own professed opinions, and generous championship from some who were on the other side in matters of religion; and he never fanaticized moral standards. Other observers, without his provocations, were less lenient. A new element of hostility to Conservatism entered into political life, and the party was sensibly curtailed of prestige.

In regard to the religious side of the struggle Bradlaugh was at least equally judicial. The platoon of prominent men of unquestioned Christian faith who had all along stood by him in the battle over the oath were ever before his eyes, as was the fact that nine-tenths of the electors who voted for him were orthodox; and so far from putting any new passion into his criticism of

religion, he became more measured, more strictly scientific. The hysteria of battle he never knew, save in the one moment of fierce resentment of Northcote's trick of having him ejected by physical force. Resentment may have steeled but it never poisoned his heart, or embittered his philosophy. Nothing, however, could hinder that for multitudes of his fellow freethinkers the struggle should give a new edge to their weapons, a new hardness to their polemic temper; and the arraignment of Christian creed, literature, ethics, and history that proceeded on the Secularist platform during those and some subsequent years was such as probably to make many more converts to Rationalism than Bradlaugh had won in his thirty. The faith lost in something like exact proportion to the stress of the malice of its adherents; for the counter-attack took on the keen coolness of spirit that befits a small force fighting against brute numbers. Organized Christianity had become newly contemptible, and was so exhibited. Gladstone's estimate may be allowed to have weight. Speaking in the House of Commons on the day after Bradlaugh's funeral, on a minor Bill of his own for Removal of Religious Disabilities, he said:—

> A distinguished man and admirable member of this House was laid yesterday in his mother earth. He was the subject of a long controversy in this House—a controversy the beginning of which we recollect, and the ending of which we recollect. We remember with what zeal it was prosecuted; we remember how summarily it was dropped: we remember, also, what reparation has been done within the last few days to the distinguished man who was the immediate object of that controversy. But does anybody who hears me believe that that controversy, so prosecuted and so abandoned, was beneficial to the Christian religion?

No public man has ever been known to reply in the

affirmative. There was, indeed, in the sequel to the Bradlaugh battle a bizarre semblance of retribution, which, had he been an orthodox martyr, would certainly have been turned to edifying account. Of all his foremost assailants, not one politically prospered. Sir Edward Clarke, who had insisted on treating the oath question as one not of law but of opinion, lived to be cold-shouldered by his fellow Conservatives; and Mr. Marjoribanks, who in his character of Liberal Whip had thought fit to be grossly offensive, was ill-starred alike in his personal and in his official life. Manning failed to become Pope. Northcote, who seems to have done violence to his better nature on the urging of his worst followers, was soon shelved under humiliating circumstances by the chief of his party, and was believed to have died broken-hearted. Parnell's tragedy needs no recalling. Churchill, after a notable fall from place and power, made a memorably tragical finish; and of the other members of the Fourth Party, which had been so zealous to drag down the heretic in the interests of party politics, all were soon relegated to obscurity, with the sole exception of the ablest, who had stood aloof from the hunt. Mr. Balfour never went beyond the compliance of saying in effect that Bradlaugh had antagonized respectable sentiments and might expect what he got. And even that view was little heard of in the latter years of Bradlaugh's life, when he won his battle in the letter as in the spirit by carrying his Affirmation Bill; or at his death, when he passed away in the odour of vindication, the House of Commons having deleted the records of its discredited resolutions while he lay unconscious forever of praise or blame.

VIII

CLOSING YEARS

THE Titanic parliamentary struggle found Bradlaugh at the beginning still a physically powerful man, capable of ejecting from a meeting two rowdy medical students with one hand and a third with the other. It left him at the close prematurely aged. To compare his photographs before and after is to see such a change as may be wrought by a long illness. But he was committed, alike by his burden of debt and his enormous appetite for political work, to living the rest of his life at a strain which few men bear in their prime. His journal and his pamphlets could yield no large income, and he had to give three lectures on most Sundays in the year to make ends meet. All the while, as a private member of Parliament, he worked as hard as a zealous Cabinet Minister. At the new start, in 1886, he had three important irons in the fire: a Bill for the Compulsory Cultivation of Land; a campaign for a Labour Bureau; and another for the Abolition of Perpetual Pensions; beside agitations for the abolition of market rights and tolls, and for the enforcement of the Truck Act. In the latter matter he had the passing satisfaction of exposing one of his worst enemies, Sir Henry Tyler, who had insulted his daughters, and who, as a director of the Rhymney Iron Company, was responsible for carrying on "an infamous system by which poor men were defrauded of part of their earnings." A Government prosecution resulted in a conviction, with the fullest statutory penalty.

On greater matters he laboured as no other member did in the cause of the people of India; and he gave warm support to Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill, getting the volatile cheers of the Irish Home Rulers who had tried to drive him out of Parliament. One who had exulted most grossly over him on his exclusion came to him with the compliment: "You have been the best Christian of us all." When some friends who had been embittered by the Irish action reproached him for his attitude, he answered: "If I cannot try to do justice to my political and religious enemies, I am unfit to be a legislator." Home Rule, he remarked, "is no four-leaved shamrock, but it is the beginning of justice." But the new Liberal Government soon fell, with its Bill; and in the new election at Northampton he again had a rabid Tory opponent, who, badly beaten, dictated a furious insult to the reporters at the declaration of the poll, the crowd having shouted him down. By this time, however, Christian opinion had been so far educated that Bishop Magee, in a review article, proposed to abolish the parliamentary oath altogether; and an attempt at a new movement in the House against the atheist failed completely. A Conservative member who was vilely insolent on the subject at a Primrose League meeting had to apologize both to Bradlaugh and to the House.

The new "leader" there, Lord Randolph Churchill, had richly earned, and had received, punitive treatment at Bradlaugh's hands, but was now all for conciliation, and secured a *stet processus* in the still outstanding appeal to the House of Lords on Bradlaugh's right to sit, which the Gladstone Ministry had refused to let drop. But that did not withhold Bradlaugh from publishing a scathing open letter to his lordship; and some time passed before his contempt for the assailant who

had called his supporters the scum and dregs of the population softened into compassion. In his own party he still found some of the old jealousy, the official Liberal Press of the time doing its best for years to suppress the fact that it was he who had secured the establishment of the Labour Bureau. When, under the Tory Government, besides assisting vig rously in the exposure of the corrupt expenditure of the Corporation of London, he not only carried his own Truck Bill, but secured from the Tory Government a Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls, there began to pass round among the Liberals who had been chagrined by his victory the legend that he had developed strong Conservative leanings. What had happened was certainly remarkable. A number of the younger Conservatives had been influenced by the national appreciation of courage to the extent of being ashamed of the part their faction had played, and, being mostly unencumbered by religion, sought his goodwill to the extent of telling the Government that they would support him in a division if the Commission were not granted. But there was no change in Bradlaugh's politics; and his most effective exposure of Churchill—already out of his leadership—took place after the Commission had been granted. After that he held his hand; indeed, when Churchill wrote to the *Times* in support of Bradlaugh's Oaths Bill permitting parliamentary affirmation, it was impossible not to recognize at least the action of repentance, whatever might have been the spirit. The appointment of a Royal Commission on Perpetual Pensions, which unanimously adopted almost the whole of Bradlaugh's report, served to heighten his credit outside, while making orthodox Liberals nervous about the new menace of his parliamentary prominence. In House talk the parliamentary year was chronicled as "Bradlaugh's session."

In the Liberal schism over Home Rule he took his stand unreservedly with Gladstone, promptly assailing Mr. Chamberlain's project of a "National Party"—the device which continues from time to time to express the exigencies of personal ambition in politics. For Gladstone, Bradlaugh had the enthusiasm of a soldier for a great leader, and he was always slow to assent to any political criticism of the "Grand Old Man"—a title which he was believed to have originated. ("Grand" was a word he rather overworked on the platform.)

Alongside of successes came sorrows. Mrs. Besant had taken to Socialism about 1885; and in 1888, after she had disturbed her friends by scheming "Ironside Circles" and other risky plans with W. T. Stead, came her conversion to the Mahatmistic "theosophy" of Madame Blavatsky. Bradlaugh and his partner would in all likelihood have married in their early days of association had there been a decent divorce law to set her free; and in that case many things might have gone differently. What he regarded as her aberrations in judgment never broke their friendship; but, as he said, he felt himself on the other side of a river from her in the main matters in which they had laboured together. When her Socialist friend, William Morris, got into political trouble with the police, she went to Bradlaugh for help, and instantly got it, though Morris had always been hostile to him. Morris gave his friends a humorous account of how Bradlaugh at once took charge of the police proceedings as if he were at the head of things. But Mrs. Besant's later step from Socialism into mysticism was for the ageing Rationalist a blow. To the last, he never said an unfriendly word of his old comrade, and never allowed any one else to say one in his presence.

Towards the end of his life, in a debate on "Humanity's

Gain from Unbelief" with a Newcastle clergyman, his antagonist thought fit to taunt him with having lost "at least eleven apostles of the Secularist party" in twenty years. The assertion was much wide of the facts; but the retort, that the rev. gentleman's own Founder, according to the records, had been deserted by his eleven apostles in an instant, had the effect with the audience that may be imagined. The rev. gentleman chose to argue that "unbelief" is a state of mental indecision, subversive of vigorous action. The retrospect of Bradlaugh's life made the quibble entertaining.

In those last years he was mainly occupied with politics; and, after incurring life-long obloquy by his Radicalism, had the experience of being vilified by the Socialists of the period, including Morris, as "a friend of the plundering classes." British post-Owenite Socialism has always stood out from that of other European countries in being scrupulously detached in the mass from intellectual interests; and its exponents used to argue that Bradlaugh had deflected democratic progress by interesting working men in such questions as the truth of the Bible and religion, to say nothing of the population question. There were some notable exceptions, such as Mr. Belfort Bax; but the Fabians and other sections were at one in striving to keep the thoughts of the workers strictly concentrated on bread and butter. The attitude appears to be specially English: the British Liberal press to this day cherishes religious obscurantism in a fashion that makes Continental Liberals stare. Bradlaugh's followers, trained to reason on all issues, were apt to be as caustic critics of Socialist Utopianism as they were of the current religion; and the Socialists of that day were proportionately resentful. The younger ones, conscious of having reached final truth in virtue of being late and not early Victorians,

pronounced his politics, in their manner, obsolete. Now that Marxism has become perceptibly obsolete for their more instructed successors it may be generally possible to realize that he did their cause more service than they could by exposing their consummate incompetence to face the practical problem. At that stage the Fabian Society was feverishly resentful of the vogue won by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. That a "Boston Sunday-school teacher" should presume to elaborate a working scheme of Socialism when they had disdained the attempt was not to be pardoned. The declaration of some that they preferred "the London of Dickens" to the Bellamy vision was really an unconscious testimony to the efficiency with which Bradlaugh had riddled their own hazy proposals.

It is, however, quite a mistake to say that Bradlaugh was a rigid individualist. He once or thrice used that name as against the doctrines of absolutist Socialism, having innately that perception of the value of individual initiative which the more thoughtful Socialists are now coming to entertain. But in private, on the immediate issue, he said that he was neither individualist nor Socialist. He found himself a member of a complex community, still interpenetrated with survivals of old feudalism and class antagonism, and he held it the business of a legislator to plan for such a society as a sane physician prescribes for the special constitution of the individual patient, not for a theoretic human body which does not exist. And that was his line of action. His Truck Act, the Labour Bureau, the notably stringent Bill for the Compulsory Cultivation of Land which he was never able to carry—these were far from being individualist measures. He was in the very van of the politically possible, as he had been in his youth and prime, when he fought for franchise reform and com-

pulsory national education—also a non-individualist ideal. While the professed Socialists were volubly theorizing, amateurishly at that, he was making things move on. Only in respect of his republicanism did he abandon as impracticable his old propaganda, though he never altered the description of his journal as "Republican, Atheistic, Malthusian."

Had he lived a year or two longer, with health, the respectables of the Liberal party would have been much disquieted by the rapidly growing opinion that this man, so singularly efficient as a legislator, should sit in the next Liberal Ministry. They were spared the trial, as he was spared an extension of the experience he had over the Employers' Liability Bill of 1888, which he defended against Trade Unionists who opposed it by arguments which struck at their own Bills. Such opposition he had long before predicted as not unlikely. He foresaw that in detail Labour would seek its own interest very much as the employers in the past had sought theirs, and he cared above all things for justice. Once, appointed as arbitrator in a trade dispute, he had given nearly equal offence to both sides—to the employers by insisting on the complete production of their books, to the men by after all giving an award unexpectedly favourable to the masters. Such thorns are the portion of the practical politician who keeps a conscience.

Bradlaugh debated Socialism in writing, amicably but firmly, with Mrs. Besant, before she gave up Socialism for theosophy; later with Mr. Belfort Bax; and twice on the platform with Mr. Hyndman; and a study of these debates will still be found educative. Always he forced his antagonists to the vital issue: Is Socialism Communism or is it not?—a point on which they were extremely loth to face a logical conclusion; and again and again he exposed the falsity of the Marxian formula

of a progressive worsening of the lot of Labour. More than any polemist in his time he thereby arrested the contagion of a thoughtless Socialism in his own country. The Socialist irritation was proportionate; and in his last debate with Mr. Hyndman in 1890 the rank-and-file of the movement illustrated their unfitness to plan a just and workable social system by constant disorderly interruptions. By that time his health was visibly wrecked and his end was near; but there was no modification of disorder on that score.

Meantime he had well wound up some of his main tasks. In 1888 he had a reverse, in respect of a farcical libel action brought against him by a Tory agitator named Peters, in a matter that began in 1886, when Bradlaugh stated in the House that Peters had been financed by leading Conservatives in a "Fair Trade" demonstration. A cheque of Lord Salisbury's had been in dispute, and investigation was then refused; but when the matter came to the Courts in 1888 his lordship testified that he had sent no cheque; and though there was very obviously no legal "libel" in the case, the judge, Baron Huddleston, directed the jury that there was, with the result of a verdict of £300 damages. The same judge in the following year, when Mrs. Besant brought an action against a clergyman for an extremely vile libel, actually directed the jury that the only question for them was whether the libeller had honestly believed his assertion to be true—the direct contrary of the direction he had given in the Peters case. In that matter, Bradlaugh's fellow members showed their sense of the situation by subscribing to pay the damages and costs for him; and Mr. Frank Lockwood's verses, beginning "Halves, my Peters!" which were *not* made the subject of any "libel" action, remain on record to hint the professional view of the trial.

In the House his status rose more and more. In a debate on an amendment to the Address in 1888 concerning the troubles of Scotch Crofters, Mr. Balfour, recommending emigration, argued that the trouble was over-population, and condemned the recklessness of the crofters in that matter. Bradlaugh commented keenly on this official adoption of a view of population which, when he had urged it in the past, had "made him the mark for some of the most wicked language that one man could use against another." Mr. Balfour at once rose to say, with emphasis: "*I* never in my life used any such language against the hon. gentleman; never, never." It was a memorable utterance. But the Tory party in general had done as Bradlaugh said; and it was now left to Bradlaugh to insist that "emigration ought not to be thought of as a remedy until other means had been tried; until the unjust conditions which hampered the poor, and which had been artificially created by the class to which the hon. gentleman opposite belonged, had been swept away." Which was certainly not Conservative individualism.

In the same year he carried his Oaths Bill, which made it impossible for any Freethinker in future to suffer as he had suffered for honesty in avowal of opinion. His great difficulty with the measure was that Christian lawyers, knowing the common proclivity to perjury among uneducated believers, would not consent to let Freethinkers have benefit of conscience unless the right to affirm were refused to Christians who had *no* conscientious objections to an oath as such. In order to save his Bill, he accepted an amendment to that effect. No objection was made at the time; but months afterwards some leading Liberal members began a surprising opposition. The changes were rung on the effects of a declaration of "no religious belief" and the

formula "inconsistent with any religious belief"; and many of the leading objectors seem to have entirely failed to grasp the issue. The demand to exclude every kind of question as to the opinions of a witness or juror was perfectly idle; it could not be obtained. When leading Liberals thus confused the issue and obstructed the reform, it was inevitable that all the inert Liberals (including a number at Northampton) who had never moved a finger for any reform in oath usage should denounce the reformer as having surrendered his principle. Obviously there was no surrender. Any Christian who conscientiously objected to oath-taking was left free to object. Those who have no conscientious objection, and who attach weight to the oath, may consistently be called upon to take it, since by definition it obliges them to special veracity. The only alternative is to abolish the legal use of oaths altogether, and this was unattainable. Bradlaugh, by accepting the amendment, made possible a relief to those who most required it.

In the end the Bill passed very smoothly through the Upper House, being managed by Earl Spencer and Lord Coleridge, with the approval of the Archbishop of Canterbury; while in the House of Commons, as a result of his campaign, the Conservative Government stood pledged to abolish Perpetual Pensions. As against these satisfactions he had the experience of being grossly libelled in a professed "Life" of him, financed by the then editor of the *Secular Review*, afterwards the *Agnostic Journal*. The coadjutors in the enterprise, birds of a feather, quarrelled fiercely over their money matters, and two of them gave Bradlaugh evidence against the editor, who at length begged for mercy, professed to have no copies of the book in his possession, and finally, at Bradlaugh's death, published a remorseful article in his praise. It was not the only instance in

Bradlaugh's experience of a black sheep on his own side of the fence. On the other hand, industrial distress in mining and other centres having greatly reduced the sale of his journal, thus aggravating the burden of the debts run up in his legal struggles, he was generously relieved by a public subscription, started by W. T. Stead, most chivalrous of journalists. A number of Churchmen and Conservatives gave, some of them largely; and though he begged to have the subscription closed on his birthday, thus limiting the amount, he was enabled to pay off all his law debts and some of the others. But over this comfort soon fell the shadow of a new sorrow. On December 2 his daughter Alice died, aged thirty-two, making a woeful blank in his little household. Her place there was taken by his married daughter, Mrs. Bonner; and to the end he lived in the simple lodging, over a shop in St. John's Wood, which had been his home for fourteen years.

One of the many proofs of changed feeling towards him came from the National Liberal Club. In 1884 he had been invited to become a member, and on his making application a faction in the Club contrived to put upon him the insult of refusing to elect him. Now, in 1889, he was elected without his knowledge, a member paying his first year's subscription. But he was not to profit long by the late sunshine. In October, after a parliamentary session in which he toiled as hard as ever, came a dangerous and prostrating illness, the beginning of "Bright's disease." Rest and recreation, the doctors held, might have averted it; but a long rest he never could afford. So much had common feeling changed that prayers were now offered up for his recovery in many churches, the *British Weekly* demurring. And one Halifax clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Millson, gave a lecture to raise financial help, realizing £10.

He recovered so far as to be fit to go on a voyage of recuperation to India, where he was able to deliver an address, marked by ripe political wisdom, to the Indian Congress, which received him with a memorable demonstration of enthusiastic gratitude. Throughout his whole parliamentary time, and in his journal, he had been the devoted advocate of Indian interests, needs, and claims, thus earning the title of "member for India," which had before been given to Fawcett. If appreciation could have given him back strength, he would have been restored to full vigour. But in his way of life, always toiling at desk, on the platform, and in Parliament, restoration was unattainable. In 1890 he resigned his Presidentship of the National Secular Society, his successor being G. W. Foote, the able and eloquent editor of the *Freethinker*. "The battle of Freethought in this country," Bradlaugh told his followers in his closing speech, "is not over." His calculation was that it would ultimately lie between Freethought and Rome. But his own battles were now nearly done.

In 1890 died his old friend and right-hand helper, Thomas Adams, ex-Mayor of Northampton. Such bereavements, and his own near vision of death, left his beliefs wholly unimpaired; and his calm criticism of Gladstone's *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* was as trenchant in its quiet way as anything of his earlier days. In the House, fighting the general battle of India, he defended the Maharajah of Kashmir, then arbitrarily deposed, and was duly accused of kowtowing to royalty. Within three years the Maharajah was restored. For the Indian people Bradlaugh worked to the end. Two resorts to his favourite recreation, fishing on Loch Long, kept him going through the year, lecturing for his income as of old, when he would fain have rested from such labours. The shop of the Freethought Publishing Company in Fleet

Street was closed, for financial reasons; and in December, 1890, the partnership between him and Mrs. Besant was dissolved.

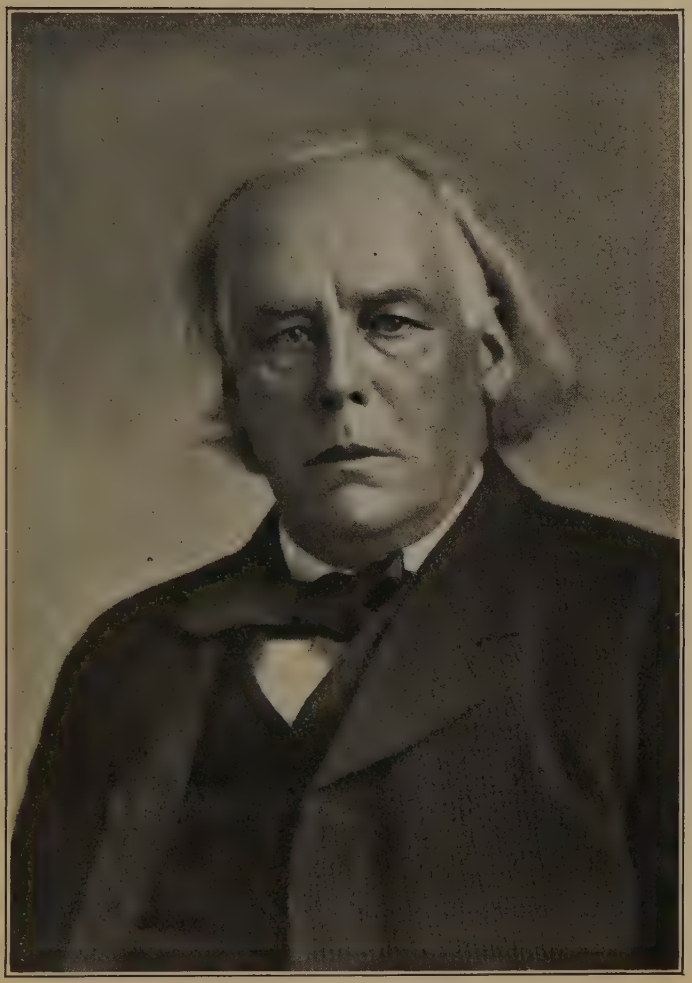
Still he held on. In the new session of 1891 he made a push to achieve the consummation of his parliamentary battle, the formal expunging from the journals of the House of Commons of the old resolutions excluding him, after the precedent of the case of Wilkes. But one day he came home very ill, though not till a terrible heart-spasm followed three days later would he take to bed; and now, the fatal disease being plainly in the ascendant again, the crowning victory seemed impossible. Yet it was achieved. Dr. W. A. Hunter, M.P., on being appealed to, readily consented to take the matter in charge; and when the news of this was brought to the patient he hailed it with high content. "The very man I would have had do it," he exclaimed, and turned himself to rest. Hunter succeeded to admiration (January 27). Sir Edward Clarke, indeed, protested that the deletion of the resolutions would be "a mark of ignominy"—which it was, for the wrong-doers of the last decade. But Mr. W. H. Smith, as leader of the House, was friendly. A very orthodox man, he privately avowed a high respect for Bradlaugh's honesty—a feeling which was heartily reciprocated. He now gave his assent to the motion for the expunging of the resolutions; and, despite some further outcry by individual Conservatives, it was finally carried without dissent, amid cheers. The dying man, now unconscious, never knew. For his friends it was the supreme pang and the one comfort that, "ever a fighter," he should have been thus strangely victorious in death. That came on the morning of January 30, 1891. He was only fifty-seven years and four months old.

As before, there had been prayers for his recovery in

many churches, and the usual legends of recantation were current; in view of which his daughter took the precaution of procuring the signed testimony of all who attended him in his illness that throughout he had never uttered one word either directly or indirectly bearing on religion or any religious subject. In November he had published one of his last non-political lectures, *My Heresy Now and Thirty Years Ago*, and in December he had lectured on "Life, Death, and Immortality" without a wavering word. He was not of the wavering sort.

By his own wish his funeral was without any form of "service." His daughter Alice, an earnest science-teacher, had desired to be cremated; but chance had prevented. As he had never concerned himself about the disposal of his remains, his surviving daughter chose to let it be "earth to earth," in the old fashion. To his funeral, at Brookwood Cemetery, came by train thousands of men and women of all classes, from all parts of England, Mr. John Morley being the most distinguished in the crowd. The dead man had always disliked mourning garments and badges, and those who knew this conformed to his tastes. In sad silence, with uncovered heads, they all stood while the coffin was lowered; and as they filed past the grave hundreds threw into it their little tri-coloured rosettes of the "Northampton colours." An hour after, when friends went back for a last look, they found that a band of sorrowful men had taken the shovels from the grave-diggers and were one by one slowly casting into the grave their last tribute, covering up,

> With only perhaps some tear,
> Each for his brother the hushed
> Heart and the limitless dreams
> With a little gift of sand.



AGED 57

Facing p. 112

IX

INFLUENCE AND PERSONALITY

For the majority of conventional English people in his day, it will already have been gathered by the unbiased reader, Bradlaugh was a kind of ogre. He was detested not merely because of his anti-religious doctrines, though, as we have seen, there was much malignity on that head, but because he was a very formidable force in popular politics, making very many Radicals, and a good many republicans, as well as many freethinkers. As compared with leaders like Gladstone and Bright, he had but a small middle-class following; but among the working mass he evoked a devotion of the intensest kind. No one so visibly hypnotized and swayed a great meeting as he. The orator's voice, pleasant in ordinary conversation, was rather trumpet-like than musical when raised to its immense power; at times it was distinctly metallic; and, technically speaking, he did not use it well. But as a platform instrument it was of marvellous potency. In the period when he went round the country addressing meetings and challenging by formal resolution support for his claim to take his seat, there could constantly be witnessed the curious spectacle of the slowly and reluctantly raised hands of many respectable citizens who gave him no goodwill, but who for the life of them could not refuse their vote to that overwhelming advocacy.

It can thus be understood how, from his early youth to his death, he had throughout England many thousands of devoted adherents, men and women who

grew old with him, but for many of whom he was always "the boy" who had brought into their lives the light of a reasoned conviction on the problems of life and death. In all of the many struggles in which he had to face the risk of financial ruin, their pence came to his aid. Once I found him crying over the news that a poor old couple in Northampton, after having thus helped through their nobly humble lives, had decided to do without their bi-weekly glass of supper beer in order to send the price to help him. Over that he had "broken down."

On his side he gave something that was also precious — the spirit which he imbibed or reinforced from Emerson in his boyhood. I knew personally two men whose lives he transfigured in the fashion in which "conversion" is said at times to operate, turning them from topers into model citizens. Of neither case had Bradlaugh personal knowledge. The intellectual influence was proportionate to, and bound up with, the emotional. In 1873 Sir Charles Dilke was quoted by Wendell Phillips at Boston, on the authority of Mr. Jenkins, author of *Ginx's Baby*, as having said of Bradlaugh that he "does the thinking for more minds, has more influence, than any other man in England." This may have been an over-statement; but Dilke was even in his youth a keen and shrewd observer. Later he seems to have changed his tone. His biographers tell that Sir Charles never took part in any debate on the Bradlaugh struggle: "He supported Mr. Gladstone's views in favour of allowing affirmation; but he did so without heartiness, disliking 'the trade of living on blatant atheism,' and finding in himself tendencies which led him to fear that he was clerically minded. He had always an extreme dislike of talk or writing that offended legitimate susceptibilities."[1]

[1] *Life of Sir C. W. Dilke*, by Stephen Gwynn, M.P., and Miss G. M. Tuckwell (1917), i, 316.

It must be some obscure malady of the speech-controlling nerve centres that still causes many educated and intelligent people, when they have to say "atheist," mechanically to prefix "blatant." The words seem for minds so affected to go bracketed, like "implicit faith," "crass materialism," and "God damn." If the term "blatant" was actually used by Dilke, and if it was meant to apply to Bradlaugh's appeal to be allowed to take his seat on affirmation, it was part of the wilfully false legend that he obtruded his atheism on the House. If Dilke used it in his religious mood to describe Bradlaugh's advocacy of his beliefs, the answer is that Sir Charles, the best-informed man of his generation on all matters of practical politics, had no competence in philosophy or in any question of religion. The phrase about the trade of living by blatant atheism is for Dilke surprisingly fatuous. The charge of making money by that means had been absurdly cast at Bradlaugh in his youth, when a lecturing journey often yielded him but a few coppers over his railway fare and his scanty rations Dilke must have known better. Bradlaugh, even before the oath struggle, while never minimizing his opinions, lectured far more often upon political than upon religious questions, and could at any time have decupled his income by renouncing atheism, or even by simply concealing it. The fling of the man of inherited fortune savours of the insolence which, in discussions on the payment of members of Parliament, always appears to take for granted that inherited wealth is a positive merit.

If Dilke had in him clerical tendencies, they never moved him to disparage his admired friend Gambetta, who was also the friend of Bradlaugh, and to whom Bradlaugh expressly appealed to modify the retaliatory anti-clericalism of his party in France. If "clerically minded" meant in Dilke's case religiously minded, his

proclivities in that kind brought him small solace. His own experience of "legitimate susceptibilities" had not been fortunate. A comparison of the two men in point of moral rectitude would not be to Dilke's advantage. Some of us who greatly admired his accomplishments, and sympathized over the tragedy of his career, had cause, later, to note another aspect of his personality.

In private life Bradlaugh was no more given than his best-bred neighbours to obtruding his opinions. His range of table discourse was wide, and it ran little to controversy. The English legend of his offensiveness found no public acceptance in America, where he had a friendly reception from people of all classes, including Emerson; or in France, where he met with equal friendliness. When Garibaldi, the freethinker, visited England in 1864, a "great lady" thought herself bound to thrust upon him her "regret that Renan was so much read in Italy"; and Gladstone, who professed to admire him, noted in his diary that "*the utmost I could get from him* was that it would be sad if the Italian people should lose its faith." The "obtrusions" in this case came from the orthodox side; and Garibaldi speedily departed, with a "painful impression that the English Government consider the prolongation of his stay in England very embarrassing, and are very anxious that he should go." Bradlaugh, in his way, had better fortune abroad; though he would perhaps have been less easy to dismiss. In England, at that period, tolerance seems to have been held to be incumbent only on heretics.

Some of the characteristics which in Bradlaugh evoked criticism, on the other hand, were developed in him by his life of battle. Heading a militant propaganda that was always under severe bombardment, constantly organizing public meetings in the teeth of hostility that tended to be violent, he acquired a somewhat military

manner in affairs. A life of constant and intense struggle cannot be lived without a force for self-assertion. But if Bradlaugh had minor deportmental faults, he was sound in all the manly virtues. Essentially brave, he was never cruel; being indeed a very genial soul, compassionate with all weakness as such, and contemptuous only towards baseness.

Mr. H. L. Stephen, Judge of the High Court of Calcutta, in an introduction (exemplary for bad writing) to a reprint of Cobbett's English Grammar (1906), has thought fit to state that Bradlaugh, "in fact, learnt in the House of Commons those good manners which men more happily situated may learn in boyhood. Cobbett never learnt them at all." We have seen something of what were the manners of the House thus courageously certificated; and, leaving the Judge's manners to his own warranty, we may estimate his judicial force from the further sentence :—

> The value of posthumous fame may be judged of by the *fact* that, *whereas* Mr. Bradlaugh's name *will probably* be forgotten in a generation, Cobbett is *still* a more or less popular author, and some of his works will assuredly deserve the serious attention of his fellow countrymen a century after his death.

They certainly will, while Judges can pen sentences like that. But it is not given to such judges, and such writers, to settle the duration of the memory of any man, and Bradlaugh's may haply subsist as long as Cobbett's. His manners were good enough to save him from boasting of them.

As a debater, he was scrupulously courteous; and he debated very many times, chiefly on religious matters. Sometimes he found equally courteous opponents, whose merits as such he warmly acknowledged; of one or two he became a personal friend; and no one in the series

is known to have complained of discourtesy from him; though in his youth he had once or twice occasion to complain of great polemic offensiveness in a ribald champion of religion. Of differences of opinion among his associates he was tolerant in the very highest degree: as an editor, he had no equal in that regard among my acquaintance. Until his domestic affliction forced him to be otherwise, he was a man of large and various hospitality, and of many friends. Of these was the subsequently famous James Thomson, whose *City of Dreadful Night* was published in Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*. Some wiseacres, instead of recognizing that the publication was as journalism quixotic, have condemned the editor for not somehow contriving to make Thomson's life one of financial ease. In point of fact, he housed him for long periods, treating him as a brother, finding for him post after post, which Thomson always lost, for the one sad reason.

There has arisen in some literary quarters, I gather, the belief that Thomson's incurable dipsomania revolted the "Puritanic" side of Bradlaugh, who is supposed to have turned the hapless poet adrift. This is an absolute delusion. Thomson was forgiven times without number. When he had gone on one of his drinking bouts, the good woman servant who was one of the blessings of the Bradlaugh family used to seek for him in his haunts, retrieve him, and bring him home, where he never heard an unkind word, being loved with the affection he himself long gave. But literary people have to realize that dipsomania breaks down character as well as physique, and makes changelings. Thomson, made morbid by his own sense of weakness and failure, and seeking solace against his sense of humiliation, came under the influence of certain persons who flattered him, persuaded him that he had been exploited and ill-used,

and turned him against his friend. It was after a gratuitously insulting public display of hostility by Thomson, possible to him only in a state of demoralization, that Bradlaugh, stung to anger with him for the first time, made a fierce retort—the last word that passed between them, though the perverted poet uttered many more malignant aspersions. It was the climax of Thomson's spiritual tragedy. The pretence that he had in any way furthered Bradlaugh's fortunes by his scattered journalistic contributions, for which he was more liberally paid than the results could ever warrant, can be honestly made only by men who know nothing of practical journalism.

In his later years the broken poet turned away from his misleaders. A man for whom Bradlaugh had neither respect nor liking, and who had abundantly forfeited his confidence, came to him one day with a bundle of letters of Thomson's in which, he stated, the poet scathingly commented on the treatment he had received from his chief associate in hostility. Bradlaugh, who knew too well the likelihood of the statement, contemptuously refused to go into the matter at all. In his family, where the poet had been the dearest friend of the children, he rarely spoke of him again, and never without tenderness for "poor Thomson." The girls heard of the quarrel only from outsiders.

To Bradlaugh, personal vindictiveness was quite alien. Any detestations he ever entertained for long were impersonal; and not only did he never feel it necessary to express "horror," in the orthodox manner, at the religious opinions which he held to be false, he never brooded on the many foul aspersions cast at him publicly, after he had once branded them, and never exulted over the reverses of his enemies. Of rabid old Newdegate, who had finally to sell his timber to pay his

law costs, the proposed victim of the suit spoke with commiseration. It is doubtless a common experience that the wronged man, if he keeps his sanity, hates less than do the wrongers. But there are contrary examples; and Bradlaugh privately avowed that, having seen men with grievances lose their balance, he took pains to keep his. One of his disciplines during his Parliamentary struggle was to work over the earlier part of his textual scrutiny of the Old Testament, an entirely unemotional task, which resulted in a special volume on Genesis, singularly disappointing to any religious reader who might seek in it for violent language. But as every one knows who heard many of his lectures, violence had no part in his polemic; and his satire was but intermittent. After a keen survey of the ethical purport of the Pentateuch he would close with the simple challenge: "This is the narrative of the Bible: is it true?"

Mr. G. K. Chesterton, whose present Church has the worst record for iniquity and calumny in the Parliamentary struggle, and who makes no claim to have heard the victim lecture, once spoke at a Church Congress of "the exploded trumpery and nonsense which Bradlaugh and others used to talk," and its "coarse blasphemy." Mr. Chesterton, like Manning, relies on the method of bluster, and, like him, resorts spontaneously to coarseness in order to impute it. But Mr. Chesterton is not singular in the resort to facile aspersion of the dead. Mr. Herbert Paul, in his *History of Modern England*, makes a general attack on "the *National Reformer*, in which the coarse materialism of Charles Bradlaugh found irreverent expression." Mr. Paul is the historian who once described Toland, *Asgill*, Collins, and *Coward* as "deists" of Swift's time, who fretted that "clear, strong mind" by exhibiting "the pretentious cleverness of men who acquired a

spurious reputation for wit and learning by their attacks upon established beliefs." The comprehensive ignorance here displayed concerning Asgill and Coward—both of whom Mr. Paul aspersed as bad writers on the strength of Swift's "profound and just contempt"—is matched in the account of the *National Reformer*, from which Mr. Paul did not think fit to cite one passage. One of its ablest contributors, who wrote in it regularly for the best part of a lifetime, was an opponent of every semblance of professed "materialism"; and Bradlaugh's philosophy was no more coarsely materialist than Spinoza's. But these matters are commonly disposed of in Mr. Paul's fashion by men who, like him, are unable to tell what materialism means. The charge is as accurate as Mr. Frederick Greenwood's allegation in his journal, that Bradlaugh preached "Free Love"—a mendacious libel, for which the victim had no chance of redress in the law courts, and by which the libeller ostensibly lost no credit among his contemporaries.

The sum of the matter is that the man thus constantly and malignantly vilified was remarkably free from malignity. Mr. Winston Churchill, in his brilliant life of his father, making no apology for Lord Randolph's action and language on the oath question, expresses satisfaction over a testimony to the effect that Bradlaugh had declared himself as compelled to forgive his lordship for past offences, on the score of his good work for economy in national expenditure. Bradlaugh's privately avowed reason for forgiving his enemy was that he had been told of a really generous action done by him. But before that he had avowed a sense of pity for the overweighted politician, nervously struggling to be dignified in the position of leader of the House, for which he had inadequate qualification. When England later read or heard the reports of the ghastly Parliamentary scene in

which Lord Randolph's final physical and mental breakdown was revealed, some, remembering how he had helped to lead the foul hunt in 1880, looked on that account with a fainter compassion on the falling castaway. But Bradlaugh, had he lived, would not have been one of these.

To his fellow-freethinkers his constant teaching was an admonition to patient study of all the questions they discussed. Mrs. Besant has told how he thus counselled her. Lastly, he never indulged in inflated forecasts. "No man ever saw a religion die" was his comment on the over-confident utterances of some of his party. If since his day the creed which he impugned has undergone somewhat rapid transformation, it is in part due to the strictly veridical spirit in which he assailed it.

For the rest, he forced on the organized Christianity of his time and country a chastening experience of shame by his long struggle and his final victory. In the words of Mr. Birrell: "Rowdy noblemen, intemperate country gentlemen, sterile lawyers, cynical but wealthy sceptics who maintain religion as another fence round their property, hereditary Nonconformists whose God is respectability and whose goal a baronetcy, contrived, with a score or two of bigots thrown in, to make a carnival of folly, a veritable devil's dance of blasphemy. The debates on Bradlaugh's oath-taking extended over four [*read* six] years, and will make melancholy reading for posterity." They were so for many when they took place. If England thereafter grew intellectually more honest and morally more civilized, she owes the betterment in large measure to the strong soul who compelled her to respect her own laws.

PRINTED BY WATTS AND CO., JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET ST., LONDON, E.C.4.